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SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.



SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

A Story.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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BOOK THE THIRD.

DOCTOR CAMERON (*continued*).

SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST SKIRMISH.

DR. CAMERON had gone away for that night. Mrs. Lepell was left to soft and charming dreams and pictures ; though, indeed, it did not seem clear how those dreams and pictures were ever to take perfect shape ; still, out of the capricious future, with such beginnings, Heaven knows what might be evolved. On the next day he came again, and, greeting her with grim austerity, passed up. The three—he, Helen and her father—sat together upstairs. Was it in council ? Another time she might have been suspicious of this league ; but now she was too good-humoured and full of hope to be disturbed at anything. She

even went up—their talking stopped when they saw her.

“Go on,” she said, smiling, “don’t mind me. What are you talking of?”

The Doctor rose gravely, and said—

“Mr. Lepell *was* talking of you.”

“Ah!” she said, going over to him, “that is kind! How do you feel to-day, dear? How does the new physician——”

The sick man looked at her distrustfully, and said—

“Well, very well. I look on it as a blessing that he has come under this roof. He will cure me in more ways than one.”

Mrs. Lepell looked at the Doctor with an amused air.

“Oh, I see,” she said; “quite right; most necessary for us all.”

“It is,” said the Doctor, gravely.

“The onething necessary,” repeated Mrs. Lepell.

“I cannot bear *that*,” he said; “you must spare *that* at least. The greatest prince or duchess in the land—even from them it must not be.”

At this moment entered Patty, with a letter—
“From Lord John Raby, ma’am,” she said,
“and no answer.”

The Doctor’s face flushed up. He motioned gravely to Mr. Lepell, who raised himself excitedly on his pillow.

“We were speaking of that as you came in. Weak as I am, degraded as I have been, I have resolved on one thing at least. Go away, my pet, a moment. We must take care of the innocent. *That* is a sacred charge, and I cannot have my daughter contaminated by the presence of wicked men like that. It must not be. It *shall* not be, while I live.”

“I have no right to interfere here,” said the Doctor; “but, I understood, from what Mrs. Lepell said yesterday, that all this was over. Now it seems, on the contrary, that it is beginning afresh. I did indeed expect better things; but——”

She, meanwhile, was reading her letter; a little discomposed, possibly, by the contents. They were very short:—

"You are quite under a mistake, my dear madam, altogether. You have mistaken *me* too, All my life I have accustomed myself to make terms, and have generally succeeded in that way pretty well. So, if you wait until I apologise, as you call it, it will be a very long business. What if I took it into my head to make others apologise? You remember the story I told you—as a warning, I confess—of the young married lady who tried the same trick with me! At any rate, I can be indulgent—all the better for you—and leave things as they are.

"J. R."

"Do you hear me?" went on Mr. Lepell, with trembling voice. "Or is this affected indifference? But it will not do now. I am accountable to God for the charge of the innocent. I have been too culpable hitherto—too weak and neglectful to have allowed a vile wretch like that to enter under my roof. His very presence is contagion."

Mrs. Lepell gave a half smile, half start, and

looked over at the Doctor. She remembered these words.

“ ‘ Presence is contagion !’ O, I see !” she said ;
“ I know all this now. What has this gentleman been pleased to say I have done now ?”

“ Are you serious in your question ?” he said.

“ Perfectly.”

“ Well, then, you agreed with all I said yesterday. I told you of the infamous character of the man, which common charity makes me believe was all new to you. Any other person—forgive my freedom—in your position would have shrunk with horror from the very sight of him. Yet you *wrote* to him. You cannot deny it ; I know it ; and you now receive an answer back from him. I do not like this. I say it is wrong where there is a young girl, one of God’s tender blossoms, stamped with the freshness of *His* image ; and I tell her father here what his duty is, and what he *must* do.”

“ And what he *will* do,” said the excited man, sitting up. “ I have been too culpable and remiss. I have neglected what my religion and

my duty called me to do too long. At that accounting day, to which I may be hurrying, I shall be made to answer heavily for all my sins ; but for this one, at least, I shall try and be free. That man shall never come here again, though you write and write again."

She bowed her head meekly under this reproof.

"You all do me wrong," she said, gently. "You know well where we met him, and who introduced him. I am not accountable for *that*. If he is so bad and designing as you say, the more difficult for a poor weak woman."

The sick man, still excited, repeated, half contemptuously, "Poor weak woman!"

She only bowed her head in reply, this time crossing her hands on her breast: "It is hard for such to do right, even if they wish to, dealing with men of that kind. The match is not equal. Besides, this gentleman—this good and holy gentleman—who is so full of that charity for his fellow-creatures which that Gospel he is always quoting, and that Heavenly Master he serves, inculcates—may be a little rash in

assuming too much against me. I shall make no reply or justification, and only thank you for sending out your daughter so as not to witness her step-mother's arraignment before this acquaintance of yesterday."

She bowed her head again, and left the room softly. Neither of them could reply. She got down to the drawing-room and seated herself in a warm chair before the fire. Her face contracted with vexation. Was she thinking that she was alone in that house, with no friend, and strangers brought in to be her enemies? Nevertheless, she had not lost her dignity, and, on the whole, had the better of them there. She had her feet on the fender, and her dress—shall we say it?—a little raised, when she heard a heavy step behind, and hastily, and in sad confusion, returned to the normal and more becoming attitude;—she was indeed a prude, though sometime married now. The Doctor had entered.

He said: "There was some justice in the severe reply you made just now. Heaven knows I know my own defects; and perhaps there

may have been, as you say, some want of charity in what I have been saying and doing. Most likely so. If I have done wrong, I beg your pardon. Of course, I cannot expect you, as you say, to justify yourself; I have no title to do so. I know my position as well as any one; I *am* not so unworldly as you suppose; nor, give me leave to tell you, does a simplicity and folly in worldly things always attend the services of a lord. God forbid! But, as I say, if I have been hasty, I am sorry; and I tell you from my heart, I should be *glad* to know that I have been wrong."

Mrs. Lepell was looking away, it was rather dusk, but she was smiling. "Come," she said, "I am glad to hear you speak in that way. I am the poor Pariah of this house, as you will have seen already. Every hand is against me, and that *rather generous* speech comforts me. Come, in return for it you shall know what has happened. I knew your better judgment would do me justice. But though I know what is due to my dignity, to *you* I will now show how the thing really is.

Look here. Here is a scrap of my letter to Lord John, indeed a good bit of. He came here as you saw, and I told him he is *not* to come again. Can I do more?"

He read with some surprise.

"Now read *his* answer"—and she put *that* into his hand. "You see he will never come again. Not that I find myself in any way bound—I only want to *show* you that I was not writing to *invite* him here. What do you say now?"

"That I was"—he paused—"a little hasty; wrong perhaps."

"What!" she said, standing up, "is *that* all that your righteousness teaches you? only such a grudging *amende* as *that*? A poor sinner like me could quote you Scripture for something more, only that you will say it is profane. Come!"

There was a curious banter in her tone which disturbed him.

"Well, I was wrong, I suppose—I ask pardon."

"Well, *my* faith teaches me to forgive; so you are forgiven. But there is a *little* more yet. I must be set right before the world. Does not

candour as well as righteousness ordain that you should come up and own before my husband and step-daughter that you have been wrong."

He coloured.

"You exact a great deal."

"Not more, surely, than the great Christian Law of Charity—'Every idle word,' you know—and to tell you the truth, Doctor Cameron, I confess I want to secure myself for the future, *by weakening your prestige a little*—showing that your judgment is not *quite* infallible."

He looked at her a little confused, then followed her slowly. She stopped half-way up.

"There," she said, "I merely wished to frighten you. I won't ask this *amende*."

But he became cold again.

"You are perfectly right," he said; "it is only your duty by the great Commandment; neither you nor I can compound such things. I have my duty to One who is above. Go, you shall have justice, and everything fitting; and as for the future," he said, "I shall only be more cautious."

But I see—excuse me saying so—you are more clever than I thought.”

They went up into the room, and there he gravely explained what he was directed to do.

“It seems we have mistaken Mrs. Lepell, and misjudged her—I have seen the letters—and I am sorry for it.”

Mr. Lepell took his hand. “I admire you the more for this.”

As he went out Mrs. Lepell whispered to him with meaning, “*We* were mistaken! Ingenuous community. Was it not *I*?”

Later during that day Patty came up again with a message, to know if Doctor Pinkerton was there. Mrs. Lepell was sitting before her fire reading, with her feet upon the fender, and her dress in her favourite disposition.

“Of course not; surely you could tell them *that* without coming to me?”

“Only they thought you might know where he was.”

“We know nothing about him at all, in this house,” said Mrs. Lepell.

But Patty stole upstairs, knocked at her master's door, asked to see Mr. Cameron, who came out to her.

"Doctor Pinkerton is gone down to the country on a special business. He left me to do any sudden duty."

"Who sent you?"

"A Mrs. Palmer, sir. Her daughter is very ill indeed."

"I shall go, then," he said, "if they wish. You can ask them. There is Doctor Hunt, whom I know he has great confidence in. Tell them of him, too, if they should prefer him." In a few moments he went away, and drove straight to the Palmers'.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR'S VISIT.

THE events of "that night," and the strange shapeless rumours that succeeded, had been too much for the young girl; worse than all had been a letter written by Severne to her mother. Cold, cutting, and bitter, written under the influence of a neglect and contempt that was now discovered to be powerless; and written in the intoxication of one who was lifted from the depths of misery to triumph and victory. It ran—

"I am going away to Italy in an hour—thank God, not in the position you saw me in last. I cannot tell you what you and your daughter have made me suffer these few weeks back. Worse than this persecution I have endured, was the spectacle of your undisguised change with my

fortunes. Thank God for it, though ; for it has saved me from a life of greater misery. I saw you last night. I was standing near your door as you set off to go to *your* party—you in your splendid dresses—going, perhaps, to seek some one more suitable than the man of broken fortunes that you little thought was looking at you. But there was more in store for me—a bitterness, a cold, cruel, heartless stroke, that I never dreamed you could bring yourself to. When you were told of the *degradation* that had come on me, I hear you and your daughter smiled. Your diversion was not to be interrupted for such a trifle as that. But there were others—Christian angels—in that room—worldlings as you would call them ; women that the fine ladies were edging away from. *She* came to me in my troubles, and saved me. You shall know her name, and blush ; for I have heard how *you have spoken of her*. You and yours might learn from that angel. Heaven send I may live to recompense her. The world at her feet would not be too much for such disinterested goodness.

“And Heaven has put it in my power to do something. You will have heard *that* also—the death of my cousin, and of my improved hopes. There is other news, too, but all in good time. Ah! you should have thought, when you were treating me in the way you did, that worldliness is often worldly folly, and that mere honour, and loyalty to engagements, and kindness, is the best policy. You might even have waited events, like the worldly mothers do. However, that is all past and gone. Thank Heaven my eyes are opened, and I wake to a new round—a new world of affections, and even enjoyments. Perhaps I speak too warmly. If I do, recollect all I have passed through these months back, and the agonies *you and yours have added to*. There, I am going away for months, and I can only tell you I shall *never* ask you to retract the cruel dismissal I received.

“H. SEVERNE.”

This strange and frantic letter was taken in at the door by the honest landlady about eight

o'clock in the morning. The young girl in whom she felt such an interest had never slept during the night. Nay, the good woman had heard some sobs, which disturbed her good heart sadly. When the note was given in, and the bearer (it being the custom of the house to interrogate closely every bearer of every letter as to who sent him, &c.) had told that it came from Mr. Severne, it seemed like a doctor's prescription, and she crept upstairs with a delighted mystery. It was medicine from the doctor—good news—balsam. She put it into the hands of the fevered young girl. What a curative *that* was may be conceived—devoured passionately, and with burning eyes! It seemed like a death-blow, and as if some cruel pitiless fate had taken special care to arrange a perverse train of misfortune, with a special and perverse view to her misery. O, that wretched, miserable party! A few hours would have made all the difference, and saved all. When her mother came in she broke forth into a torrent of sad reproaches. "I listened to *you*, mother. You made me do this; and I have lost him now for

ever—for ever. Nothing can restore him. Now he will be rich, and he will never come back; and—and I deserve it all. And you see whose work it is. From the day I saw that woman's face at Digby, I knew she was my enemy. *She* has done it all. We should have conciliated her; I said so. Now it is too late. She has the power of a demon. O, what is to become of me? and I deserve it all."

All this time the mother was calmly reading the letter from beginning to end, not at all heeding these childish and foolish utterances. "What a woman!" she said, half aloud. "How cunning of her! She managed it wonderfully. She is *really* clever. Hush, now, my dear. You will be ill again if you don't take care."

"I do not care," she answered passionately. "I wish I was. I should like, most of all, to be out of this world; but that is too great a good fortune for me! But I deserve it all—to be so false and *wicked*, and to have acted so cruelly to *him*!"

Her mother looked at her with wonder. She never thought that her daughter was this deeply

passionate girl, who had hitherto—such was her pride—concealed her heart even from her mother. That mother was struck with the unnatural light in the brilliant eyes.

“Why, you are ill, my child! Have you slept? What have you been doing? Ah! I see—such folly!” She took her hand. “Goodness, what folly! Why, you will be in a fever if you go on. Now don’t think of this business any more. I promise you we will do something yet. This woman has taken me by surprise. But I can be as cunning as she is any day. We shall have to wait. But I tell you, you haven’t lost him yet. She shall find her match, I promise you, clever as she is.”

Indeed, this idea, more than the condition of her child, seemed to have taken possession of the mother, and made her thoughtful. Her eyes wandered restlessly over the room, as though she were planning something. But this was no comfort to the young girl. Whatever was to come, there was at best a miserable delay between—whole months, and an interminable distance to Italy.

What a remedy for a young soul in *that* condition! A delay of months, and the fatal idea of travel, sets everything at the distance of a hopeless eternity.

Later in the day she grew worse, and then Mrs. Palmer sent for Dr. Pinkerton—one of those “friendly” doctors who do not make out perfect bills of costs. There were a few patients from whom he would “take nothing;” and a “pretty girl,” or “a fine girl” who was not “stuck up,” and had something “in her,” he found a pleasure in attending, on such agreeable terms. Miss Palmer he had seen and admired, and her mother—business-like always—had at once gazetted him Family Physician.

He, as it has been seen, could not come. The Scotch doctor, Cameron, arrived in his place. He was shown to the room, and went through his duties gravely. They had confidence in him: he was so composed, and seemed so full of power. He, too, was struck, like his predecessor, with an interest in this brilliant young creature. When he came the mother had gone out. The faithful landlady stood by and listened eagerly.

"There is some worry on your mind, Miss Palmer," he said kindly, for *him*. "That I can do nothing with. But I do beg of you to put it by for the present. I know how difficult it is, and how easy to preach on such matters; but I do—seriously—ask you to try to do this. Make the attempt at least, or my poor labours will be quite without profit."

"Indeed, sir, you are right," said the faithful landlady. "The poor young lady is sadly tried; and I know she will try to do what you say. She says she does not want to get well, and would rather die."

The Doctor turned to where the bright eyes were flashing.

"This is the old story," he said, emphatically. "Some of that sickly folly of which there is too much in this world. You would wish to die because of some neglect—on account of a mere child's dream. When shall we have done with this wretched work? My dear child, for your own sake, put these things far from you; strive to keep the precious life—the days of priceless

youth and innocence that have been given to you to prepare for a happy and future world."

At this rebuke the young girl hid her face.

"I speak harshly, I know," he went on, "and not to the usual soft tune which is customary with men of my profession. If I can help you in any way I will. The advice I give you is the best. There is nothing in this world worth dying for—no man, certainly."

"Ah, sir," struck in the faithful landlady, with deep sympathy, "if you only knew! There have been some wicked folk at work, I know, else all would have gone on so happily and pleasantly. There is a cruel woman, sir——"

"Hush!" said the sick girl, raising herself hastily. "You mustn't speak of that. I shall be better," she said to the Doctor. "I know I shall—*soon*. Thank you, though, for your kind advice, and I shall try and follow it, if I can. But it is very hard."

He went down slowly. The faithful landlady poured out mysterious whisperings. "The poor heart," she said. "What is to become of her?"

Of all the dismal histories you ever heard, sir, this is one. And all, I am convinced, would have gone straight, sir, but for a designing woman—a Mrs. Lepell——”

“Who?” said the Doctor, stopping short, with a start. “Mrs. Lepell, did you say?”

“She is at the bottom of it. The young man was coming here regularly, and never were two more attached, or would have made a nicer couple; but this lady had designs of her own, or it might be from mere mischief and devilry, of which God knows there is enough in this world——”

“Who is this young man?” said he, abruptly.

“Mr. Severne,” said the landlady—“a noble young man that loves her, but got into distress, poor fellow, and then *her* mother grew cold on him, which is natural enough for mothers. But the other was a deep one, and saw further, sir, or knew more, that somehow the turn was coming. And so he is now a rich man, and next heir to a title, they say, all of a sudden; and the poor sick child upstairs is left deserted, as he thinks she

threw him off because he was poor, and he is not likely to come back to her now."

The Doctor listened with deep thought. "This may be all fanciful," he said. "You should be careful in saying these things. Why should Mrs. Lepell do such a thing? Even according to a worldly view what profit could she find——?"

"Ah, sir," said the other, eagerly. "You are too good and innocent to be up to the ways of these wicked women. We have all heard of Dr. Cameron and his goodness——"

"Hush, hush!" he said, emphatically. "Please dont."

"They tell me *she has a dying husband*: and from the day she met this young fellow in the country the mischief began. There are games and games, sir; and hers is not so bad a one."

As she said the words, "a dying husband," he almost started. A sort of conviction came into his eyes—they dropped upon the ground. Suddenly she ran to the window. "Ah! here is Mrs. Palmer home again—just in time, sir."

That lady came in "just in time," as was

remarked. She made a feint of offering the usual remuneration, but, as she had anticipated, it was declined. "I am merely acting for Dr. Pinkerton," he said, "as a friend. You will speak to him." He was, indeed, thinking of other matters. He went away in deep thought; and, as he turned down the street, he said to himself half-aloud, "She could *hardly* be so wicked. Impossible—and yet, it seems too likely. But I shall watch—I shall watch."

He returned to Mr. Lepell's, and was met anxiously by Helen on the stair. "I am so glad you have come," she said, with wistful face. "Papa has sent down a dozen times to know have you come back."

"Why," he said, in surprise, "has anything happened? Does he want me?"

"No," she answered, "but he is restless, and he begins to miss you. I hope," she added, earnestly, "you will be as much with him as you can. Do promise me. He finds such comfort with you; you cheer him up so. Somehow I feel, Doctor Cameron," she went on, looking round with a

half-mysterious air, "that you are to be our friend and our protector. Somehow we have no one to look to, and I feel quite helpless."

"My dear child," he said, taking her hand, "these are strange promptings; but it is foolish to disregard them. On the very day I entered this house something seemed to whisper to me also, that I was to have a mission here—that I was called to help and aid a good and virtuous family. And I heard this call, I prayed that I might have strength to carry out that duty, whatever shape it might take. But to-day I have heard a more mysterious warning still. Wonderfully does Providence order things! Yes, there is a task before me in this house—a duty, and I now solemnly accept it. I shall protect you and your father, but it will need all my watchfulness and care."

She was full of alarm and flutter, and yet she seemed to half-understand. "What does this mean?" she asked.

"We must watch—we must *both* watch," he said. "I shall tell you more later. I must go now to your father. Stay! I have just come

from a sick girl—a charming, natural girl—who is suffering in mind and body. Here is another mysterious link—and here again I see that Almighty finger which directs all! You must know her—will you go and see her? She knows your father—and—hers is a very sad story. And as from this house came some of her trouble, so from this house should come some compensation.”

The young girl was soft and tender and impressionable. Here was a little picture that roused her sympathy in a moment. “I shall go at once,” she said, “nor lose a moment. Tell me where it is.”

“Good and gentle Samaritan,” he said, with grave approval. “*She* will tell you her little story, and you will then understand what I have said.” She was gone to get her bonnet. Now was heard the voice of Mr. Lepell, calling a little querulously.

Dr. Cameron went up, and as he went he said to himself, softly and devoutly, “Yes, I *feel* that I am called to save and protect this family.”

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE DINNER.

HIS company was indeed growing almost necessary to the invalid, who found a great comfort even in his presence. Long ago he had been fond of poring over abstruse old books of divinity, and those quainter and wilder speculative questions which are now more settled, and are too abstract to be of interest. Even now round his shelves were grey dotards in clothes of mouldy cut, full of all infirmities that binding is heir too. Moth-eaten eruptions, loose joints, weak sinews, worn ribs, and discoloured skin—a class of broken-down old men whom Mrs. Lepell with all her regard for the “Short Way,” must have called “musty” or “fusty.” These, Bishop Catley—the works of Shortall, the sweet-tongued dissenter, who was imprisoned by

Charles the Second, and burnt in the hand—the strange “queries” of the ingenious Dobbs, of Whalley—the sermons of Dr. Gurney—these were the things that drew him now; and the placid face, now a little contracted with pain and sickness, but with a wildness in the eye, was bent over the discoloured pages busy with some dreamy, and certainly useless speculations. Many of these ran on the dismal doctrines of Calvin—the great problem of Salvation and Election, and cruel and pitiless Reprobation. It was about this time that this last fatal notion began to take hold of him, and over it he began to talk with a weary earnestness with his friend.

Such stern selection and exclusion was the doctrine of Doctor Cameron. He believed that he himself, by an Infinite mercy, had been called and chosen, just as there were others who had been cast out from the beginning. Yet with this sick man, so earnest and feverish in the pursuit, he was very tender, to help him far away from so chilling a theory, for he saw how it would take

hold of his mind. But the other only worked his way yet deeper.

For the pair there was a fascination in the pursuit. But Dr. Cameron took care to turn the subject to profit, and he would speak gently, but firmly, to his new friend on the great Thing necessary; the awful future and the present certainty—"What is this wretched life, after all? We hold it but by a thread," &c.;—and on one of these long nights Mr. Lepell opened his heart to him and told his whole story, to which the other listened with a deep interest. It was a dismal history indeed, the end whereof had not yet come. The same thought was in each mind—the hoplessness of the future.

Yet the Doctor took his friend's hand. "More and more do I think it, that I have been sent—sent specially into this house, to help and shelter you both—under Heaven."

Now was an opportunity, and tenderly and gently he proceeded to tell him what he knew and what he suspected—hinting, indeed, more than telling. The hour was near to twelve, and

the sick man's eyes rolled and glittered with strange excitement as he heard these strange hints ; about Severne and his change of fortune, and the possible game that Mrs. Lepell might have in view.

"Mind, this may be all speculation, and it is new to you. But still, it is right that you should know. It is no harm to be on our guard. *But you may leave all to me.*" Still it came like conviction to Mr. Lepell ; and for him that was the weariest night he had yet spent.

Some days now passed over. We must beg indulgence for going minutely into all the stages of this business ; and following as minutely the train of motives, feelings, &c., which were the agents in what was going to take place within the walls of a prosy little drawing-room. With "John" bringing up coals or tea, or taking in cards below, may there not be a tremendous melodrama going on silently, and, as I firmly believe, the greater and more tremendous, because of the absence of blood and thunder, and the clashing of steel, or the smell of powder? Nay, to our

humble mind, these rather impair the interest—imparting a theatrical air. No—true tragedy runs in the path of everyday prose, under a frock-coat and waistcoat, with no scenery or foot-lights, in the relation of a Mr. and Mrs. Smith. These touch the true chord. In a *family*, every week occur things more interesting and exciting than all the murders and intrigues of the Porte St. Martin. Bad and wasteful sons, discontented daughters, the skirmishing, or savage war between husband and wife—the battle against duns and difficulty—the weary and really supernatural struggle, that finds means to keep up show and splendour in debt and difficulties—are not these topics absorbing as fairy tales? And the hand who would touch and marshal these, humbly following that unapproachable master, Balzac, should have as good an audience as the best story-teller of bigamy and murder.

Some more days went by. Mrs. Lepell was growing a little uneasy on the score of Lord John. Was her prescription going to fail? Alas! she thought she had known human nature better.

After all, if she had turned him into a bitter enemy—*this* was scarcely knowing human nature. If she had lost a good friend, all for a little stupid punctilio—and *it was only his way*,—this was not a creditable knowledge of human nature. Thinking over these things she grew provoked and distressed, and had determined to write a clever little note in the morning, which should neither be an *amende* nor a challenge, but have a happy ambiguity. Who shall blame her, if with this hostile confederacy drawing round her, she try to retain allies of her own?

More than a fortnight had gone by.

Doctor Cameron would have been well justified in holding it a special interposition of Providence, if it had happened to *him*, that a letter should have arrived that very afternoon from Lord John. Such an event actually took place. Patty—undisguisedly her lady's enemy—took care to say aloud whose "man" had brought it. The Doctor's eyes glanced over at the reader. The letter ran:

"MY DEAR MRS. L.

"You behaved badly to an old friend, but I am not angry. I pass it over. I was a bold boy, too: but I go to mamma's knee and beg pardon. There! What do you say, now? I tell you what you will do, for you owe me something, indeed. Give us a little reconciliation dinner to-morrow at seven—a couple of chops—(nothing better, if they are raging, screaming hot), and a good bottle of wine; and we shall make no noise, so as not to disturb the poor dear hubby upstairs. There, I shall drop in at seven—I know you have no engagement.

"Yours,

"J. R."

"You stand to your engagements, I see," said the Doctor, looking at her steadily.

"I do," she answered, coldly. "You may see this, if you please."

He shook his head, coldly. "No, I have no wish, no right, to inspect your correspondence. None in the world."

“Nor would I admit such a right. But for fear you should fall into such an unhappy misconception *as you did before*, and have to make so painful an *amende* to your conscience as you were obliged to do then——”

He coloured. “From what has happened since, I begin to think I was almost too hasty in that. Perhaps I might have reserved that *amende*, as you call it.”

“Generous, indeed, of you!” said she, warmly. “Did I force you to make it. Is this part of your heavenly religion. However, I want no favour. I know the position you hold in this house. There, I leave it; read it or not, as you please;” and she put it down on the table, and went out.

She left him in a strange perplexity. The effect of every meeting with her was to *un-settle* some previous resolution of his. “Artful and designing,” he thought, “as she may be in other things, in *this* matter it is possible she might be right.” After a short hesitation he took it up and read it.

When he saw her again, he said, bluntly, "I *did* read your letter, and——"

"I knew you would," she said, "a sense of justice—not, of course, curiosity—prompted you."

He did not notice this. "If I might ask, what answer will you send?"

"What *can* I send? He *will* come. My dinner is at seven."

"I suppose there is no door to the house—no servants—no police?"

"That is all absurd. I have done my part. You admitted that the other day. He has apologised. I have no wish to turn a dangerous man into an enemy. He is my friend; at least, one of my *few* friends. Unless, indeed, *you* wish to command here as my lord's lieutenant——?"

"Not in the least," he answered; "but your lord,—that *is* the point. Have you no regard for his wishes?"

"Ah, the old discussion!" she said, wearily; "tell him, if you like. But also tell him the whole truth—that I have not asked him, that I do not want him: that is, if the excitement into

which your news will throw him will allow him to listen."

Both looked at each other. "Ah!" he said, "you have a check on me there."

"Come," she said, suddenly, "enemy of mine!—suspicious, envenomed enemy that nothing will appease! You shall come, too. There! I ask you to dine, and satisfy your own eyes—and ears."

For the moment he started, then shook his head. "I should be out of place in such company."

Next day, as it drew near to seven, Mrs. Lepell was sitting in her drawing-room, very becomingly arrayed in a toilette that seemed in tone for *tête-à-tête*. Her dress had a sort of cozy compactness and roundness, edged off with frills—a "cut down" Swiss peasant's "body," white, with a green edging and trimming. She was, of course, expecting her Lord John. Down below, the chops were already hissing and writhing in the pan, as Lord John was to remark later, "like some of the poor sinners down *there*."

Suddenly entered—absolutely in a dress coat—Doctor Cameron. The young girl, Helen, was there also, dressed festively, but dispirited, as she always was now. Mrs. Lepell knew very well who had managed the attendance of *this* guest, who would have shrunk from such a party. But Doctor Cameron had thought it would be a good check. Mrs. Lepell was rather pleased. She might felicitate herself on her having managed everything so happily.

“I have accepted your invitation,” he said—
“I can see, to your disappointment. But I cannot help that. It is for your own sake I come, not for any pleasure that I can find in the matter.”

“Charming!” she answered, laughing. “You said that with all the air of a refined Frenchman. Exactly what a Frenchman *would* say, you know.”

“The highest compliment you can pay me,” he said, a little sharply. “It is as much as to say I have no falseness, or flattery, or emptiness. Though, if I chose—and there was a time when

I *could*—I could grimace and compliment with the best of them.

She tried to hide her smiles with her fan. This stiff fellow grimacing and complimenting, did seem a comic notion.

He noticed it, and said a little testily, "Ah! you can't conceive that. But it is true, I can tell you. Ballrooms, and all that goes on in ballrooms, and the whole round of dissipation—I knew all about that as well as any man—ay, and I could take it up now at this moment, if there was need."

"Hush," she said, "surely not in your present state of—awakening, I think they call it? We have cast all these vanities behind us, haven't we?"

"Profane always," he said, angrily, "nor will you ever try and understand. What I mean is, and what I said before to you is, that the ways of religion do not suppose worldly foolishness nor imbecility—nor the paths of the gospel——"

"Hallo!" said a cheery voice, "what about the paths of the gospel? Who's got in here," he

added, shading his eyes, "What, our little Bethel, I declare!"

"Doctor Cameron," said Mrs. Lepell, very gaily; "you met before, I think."

"Yes," said his lordship, bluntly, "but you don't mean to say——. What are you about *now*? I don't——"

"Dr. Cameron has kindly consented to dine with us; at a very short notice, too."

"The shorter the better," growled his lordship, eyeing the Doctor with hostility; "I never know what you are at. What I have come to tell you I can't stay?—that I have a better engagement elsewhere—ay, three of 'em for that matter. I like a lady that stands to her word."

"I am sorry you did not accept them, instead of coming to my stupid fireside."

"That's all very well," still growled Lord John, standing up over the fire. "Well, how is he—our friend upstairs—mending or not? I thought he should have the doctor's eye on him night and day? I wonder our conscientious

friend here could spare himself from such sacred duties."

In the Doctor Mrs. Lepell could not but notice a sudden change. He was not so grim and stiff; with the dress coat he had put on a greater softness of manner, and even a good humour. She, acute enough in her generation, fancied she detected the motive of this:

"His vanity is touched, and he wants to show—what, indeed, he is always preaching—that the religious mortal can be as knowing in a worldly sense as another."

She smiled as she thought of this solution. It did indeed seem very like it, for when Lord John, still growling, kept making "hits" at him, about his religious convictions, &c., the other good-humouredly turned them aside.

Dinner was announced, and Lord John gave his arm to Mrs. Lepell, and went down muttering and growling.

"What did you do this for? I believe out of infernal spite. Setting two Christians down to dine with a canting son of a swaddler like that.

I declare I could cry to think of the nice little duet we have lost."

"Hush," she said, looking round fearfully, "Lord John. Can we all do as we like? Do you not know that in *this* house I am no more than one of my own servants? *That man* is a spy on me."

"Ah! go 'long!" said he, with a burst; "spies indeed!"

The sight of the little round table was very appetizing indeed, and put him in better humour.

"This looks snug enough," he said. "It had been better if we had had the table even; no odd numbers for me. Will his Reverence give us grace?"

Doctor Cameron without hesitation said a short grace with much sincere devotion, Lord John grinning to his plate, and winking significantly to Mrs. Lepell all the time.

"Well done," he said, arranging his napkin; "I feel a better appetite after that: nothing like a blessing for the appetite. What's this—Cressy?—very good, in its way. Do you know I've

remarked a curious thing in my experience ? Of all the dinners—where we are all miserable sinners that sit down—abandoned rascals, that never think of a grace at all—I never can eat so well as at the pious dinner ; bankers, you know, and county members : I suppose that is the reason. I say, Fanny—Mary—Goosey, just a little more of that. Unfashionable, I know, as I can see in my friend the Hotgospeller's eyes."

"You should know the fashion better than a poor Hotgospeller, as you call me. I suppose your experience was a jest, but I could understand it even if it were true. I could imagine a man who had been grateful to his Maker for finding him so good a meal, eating with a better appetite than one who sat to his trough like a hog."

"Ha, ha ! very good indeed," said Lord John, enjoying his sherry. "Some of L.'s old bin, I know. But you're wrong in your natural history, friend. Hogs don't sit down to their troughs, at least, so far as I know. Our friend may have wider experience—ha ! ha !"

Mrs. Lepell tittered. "Come, Lord John," she said, "you must behave. Doctor Cameron is my friend and guest."

"Is he?" said the other, with a vindictive flash; "then he's not what you said to me going downstairs. Eh?"

Doctor Cameron coloured, and looked at her with eyes full of angry inquiry.

"I know perfectly what Mrs. Lepell thinks and says of me."

There was a purposeless malice about Lord John, which was as necessary to him as his food.

"Yes," said she, "it is open war. Doctor Cameron has come here professedly as my enemy. I don't want to be hypocritical and be pretending to keep terms."

"Charming all this little sparring is," said Lord John, looking from one to the other. "Then I tell you what, Bethel, my friend, if you think you're a match for her——"

"I am a match for no one," said the Doctor gravely. "I try to do my duty at all risks, and with what help I can find."

"From above, my friend, put that in. There's some saint says, 'Providence tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' Eh?"

"Excuse me," said the other; "make as free as you please with me, but that I cannot listen to. No. There are bounds. I am sinful enough myself, Heaven knows. And I know Mrs. Lepell here can scarcely like the sacred scripture to be——"

"Well, I think, Lord John, you might let *that* pass. It is very *wrong* of you, Lord John. And Doctor Cameron is quite good and right."

"O there need be no compliments," said the latter. "I want none in such a case. That book is too sacred to be made free with."

"Don't I tell ye," said Lord John, "I am sorry? Shall I thump my breast for you? Fine passage though, 'shorn lamb.' Where does it occur?"

"I prefer not to talk on that subject."

"Because you don't know," said Lord John, bluntly. "Bet you a guinea its not in the scripture at all."

Both stared at Lord John. That nobleman burst out into a loud fit of laughter. "Sold! Floored!" he said. "It's not! not a word of it!"

"And do you know where it is?"

"*'Sentimental Journey,'* as I live. It is, on my soul. O here *is* a game!" And he had to lay down his knife and fork to laugh.

The tears came into Mrs. Lepell's eyes.

"Floored the pious man on his own ground. It's a trap of mine. I often set it for one of the clergy, only I never can get 'em to put any money on it. Fetch the book down. *She* has it, I know. I'll show you the very page—the girl and the goat—Maria of What's-its-name. That's fine writing—the little grisette and the gloves."

Doctor Cameron interrupted him. "I know," he said; "I believe you are right, and I own myself wrong. My zeal carried me away. There is no harm in it."

"Come," said she, "that's a generous admission. Now, Lord John, I will not have *my enemy* plagued any more. Let us talk socially and enjoy the good things of life. Here is some game,

I hope done to your liking. Do you recollect the poor Digby game?"

"With all my heart," said Lord John. "Shall we have a glass of wine together? Come, your Reverence; hang all unkindness."

The two gentlemen had their glass of wine. Mrs. Lepell struck in—

"Doctor Cameron has seen the world, and tells some very amusing adventures."

"Been in Paris?" interrupted Lord John.

The other had been in Paris, and to Lord John's surprise, knew a good deal of the best cafés, and even of the shows.

"There was a time I was devoted to that sort of thing, and to the charming theatres, and the sights. What delightful nights—and society, too. I had a friend that knew all the authors, and actors, and artists."

Lord John's eyes were beginning to twinkle with interest. He was going to add—"and actresses and dancers, eh, my boy?" but he forebore; he found that the Doctor had even a special knowledge on these subjects—not the

mere surface one of outsiders. The two began to warm up. The old lamps seemed to be lighted—the music began to play—and the austere senses of the Doctor to soften by the recollection. (“Ah! I took his measure at once,” said Lord John. “He’s a lad, or a sort of lad! The old man of sin is under his white choker, or I’m no sinner myself.”) Then he told some of his adventures—out at the Havana, or on board the emigrant ship—which interested Lord John. The claret was exceedingly “nice.” Helen, who had not spoken a word the whole time, though often addressed complimentarily by Lord John, listened with an absorbed interest. The night went by charmingly; the ladies did not rise to go away, for Lord John had whispered Mrs. Lepell—“For God’s sake, don’t leave me to his Reverence.”

It was eleven o’clock when they went up to the drawing-room for coffee. Lord John came up last and more slowly—there was a glass or so to finish.

Mrs. Lepell whispered the Doctor on the landing, “Enemy as I am, I must own to have been

all wrong. You were charming to-night. I could not have believed it. Why, you are more a man of the world than *he* is. How did you do it?"

"You are convinced then?" he said, a complacent smile coming on his lips. "I am glad of it. You will own in future that there is no opposition between religion and duty and knowing the world. That was all I cared to show you. I own, too—enemy as you call me—that we have had a very pleasant evening."

"And," said she—they were now in the drawing room—"did you see the good work you have done? I never heard *him* talk that way before. So decorous, so proper, so sensible, so *reverent*. It is like a miracle. You seemed to have some strange influence over him—as indeed you seem to have of *some sort* over every one—even over me. Do you know I am terribly afraid of you?"

He became cold in a minute. "Are you?" he said. "Not that I want to conciliate or bring you over. No, indeed. I know we shall have to fight it out, as they say. We are in opposite in-

terests. You are full of prejudices against me, and——”

Enters now Lord John in great good humour. “Give us a song, Mrs. L.,” he said. “Do you, sir—do you remember that thing little Daxe used to sing on the Boulevards, in what’s his name’s café—‘Ma tulipe’—do you remember?” And his lordship began to chant—

“Ma tulipe noire,
Re-posez dans mon sein :
C’est ma mi-e !—ma mi-e !
C’est ma gloire.
Allons !—les verres pleins,
Versez, Messieurs, O ! je vous pri-e !”

“Chorus !” called out his lordship, gaily, and waving a match-box off the chimney piece.

“Ver-sez !
Ver-sez !
Versez, Messieurs, O ! je vous prie !”

“Confound it, I forget the next verse. It’s ten years ago since I heard it.”

What was his astonishment when the Doctor began in a low voice—

“Ma tulipe noire,
Restez sur mon cœur ;

Où peut-on voir
Une plus charmante fleur ?
Peste ! on ne peut croire,
Ma mie—ma belle mie !
Comme elle aime à boire.
Versez, Messieurs, O ! je vous prie ! ”

“Chorus !” again called out Lord John, waving his match-box.

“ Versez !
O ! versez !
Versez, Messieurs, je vous prie ! ”

“ You’re a wonderful fellow,” he said, going up to the Doctor. “Gad, you must come and dine with me some night at the club.”

There were numbers whom Lord John asked to dine with him at the club, but always on “some night.” Still the Doctor smiled again complacently. He had wonderful victory that night, and looked over to see the effect upon his enemy. She had listened with surprise, also ; but just as the chorus was in “full swing” her ear had caught another sound, the roll of cab wheels stopping short suddenly at the door. She was living now in such times, and in such excitement, that every indifferent action had for her a

significance. She stole over to the window, looked out, and saw that a cab with luggage on the top was at the door. She knew in a second who it was, and with a smile of approval to both gentlemen for their song, floated out of the room.

Lord John, always watchful and suspicious, had noticed the visit to the window and her disappearance. There are some who make cause and effect out of every two actions that merely succeed each other. "What the devil is she at now?" he said, impatiently, and walked over to the window. "Why, who in the name of imposition has she got here in a cab? And luggage, egad! Is she goin' to bolt with a feller? I wouldn't put it past her." The Doctor came over and looked also. He saw a gentleman get out. He wondered within himself. He was disturbed.

"Phew!" said Lord John. "I bet you a guinea it's that fellow Severne back again. I wouldn't put it past her."

The Doctor started. "Severne," he said.

"The one that was to have married Miss Palmer?"

"His own body!" said the other. "The same that broke out of jail. What infernal trick is she at now?"

By the look of impatience and anger that was on the Doctor's face, it was evident that much the same thought was in his mind.

Mrs. Jenny had fluttered downstairs full of hope and joy, and even anxiety, for this latter passion does at times wait on the other two. She had never dreamed of this—that return she had looked forward to as a hopelessly far off business; and there were such events going on. What had brought her hero *back*? As she appeared, Severne—looking handsomer than ever, only a little bronzed—ran to meet her with great warmth, and took both her hands in his.

"My little preserver," he said, affectionately. "Here I am back again; and I am so glad!"

He looked down on that pleased and glowing face, and read the joy that was in her eyes and trembling on her lips. For it has been mentioned

that one corner of Jenny's heart was filled with a regard and admiration for this chivalrous man—a feeling, of course, tempered by the superior regard and admiration which every correct wife is bound to entertain for her husband.

“And I am so glad, too,” she murmured; “I thought it was months away, or years perhaps.”

“As far off as that night was,” he said, kindly. “Do you remember it? That terrible night when you broke through the dungeon walls like a white-robed angel. If I was to live a thousand years, I should never forget you on that night. As I told you then—do as you like with me for my natural life. How is”—and he stopped, for the association was awkward—“I mean, Mr. Lepell.”

Her eyes fell on the ground. She told him he was poorly enough—struggling on.

“And yourself,” he added, in the same kind tone. “You must tell me all about that; and I will tell you all about myself, too, for you have a right to know. I and his lordship have come over. He could not stand that place after what

happened. The poor widow is still hovering between life and death."

(Our Jenny would have given the world that it had been a lady who was giving this little narrative, as she might have made a certain inquiry. But with Severne it was out of the question.)

"He will live here," he went on. "He can do nothing without me ; he cannot let me out of his sight ; he is eager that I should at once claim the inheritance that *you* got for me. You shall hear all this in detail. Tell me about yourself. How can I help *you* ? I know how you are situated, and can feel. How are things going on upstairs ? Has that doctor been troubling you ?"

"Not *he*," said she, looking down.

"Who then ?" he asked, hastily. "Then there is something for me to do. I am very glad of it. A relation—or another doctor, is it ?"

"How you guess," she said, looking up
"He has sent a successor here, who, it seems, has taken full power. He does what he likes

with my husband. He rules the house. I dare not resist him. I am too weak. He is the master!"

Severne was silent. His breast was full of burning indignation combined with pity for the gentle sufferer. "I am just in time then. I shall be here in the morning and confront him. I am *your* friend, recollect.

"But it *must* not be known that I told you," she said in terror. "Why, he is here now. There was a dinner," she added, ambiguously. "Lord John Raby—they force themselves in, these men—they all, indeed, do just as they like; but, hush!" she said, "if it was known—that——"

For a second, and only for a second, he looked at her a little doubtfully; but she had spoken so confidently, she carried herself over the dangerous past. "We shall change all that now," he said. "We shall see a different order of things. I shall come to-morrow, and you shall tell me all your troubles. From this out we shall take care to make your life happy."

The door was opened, and Lord John's red

face was put in. "Want my hat," he said. "Sorry to disturb. Hallo! Severne back again. Head over the water once more! Don't let me interrupt business (you should have locked the door, my friend, and I'd have known nothing). Good night—don't stir," and his lordship, whose rolling eyes peeped out of a strange half coat or cloak, "bundled away," as he said himself.

Mrs. Lepell hung down her head. "*This* is what I have to suffer," she said.

He was going away. "Lord Severne will be waiting," he said. "But in the morning—all in good time. I feel so happy to-night—so glad to see my preserver again. Good-bye!"

They had come out in the hall. They heard voices upstairs, a voice of expostulation, and a feeble agitated one. "You must let me down," it said. "I *must* see. I am not to be helpless in this house. Who is this at the door? Who are these men? I won't have it. I *shall* know." Such broken and frantic utterances was the unhappy invalid giving out. He had not been told of the dinner,—it was the stopping of the

cab and the sound of voices below that had roused him.

Doctor Cameron was doing all he could to restrain him. The heart of Mrs. Lepell—she stood in the hall with her protector—shrank within her. They were coming down. “Go! go!” she whispered, “you can see what is coming. This is only my usual lot.” Severne knew not what to do.

What a scene followed. The worn face, the tall shrunk form, wrapped in a cloak, the hair grey and nearly white, the eyes flaming like coals, the voice high and excited. On his arm hung his daughter, terrified, and in a piteous voice imploring him to go back. But the sight of Severne seemed to rouse him to a sort of fury.

“So it is you!” he cried. “I *knew* it was. Something told me. What has brought him here? Is this *my* house? Is it to be filled in this way with rioting?”

Mrs. Lepell could only whisper, “O, speak to him—soothe him. What *is* to become of us.”

The Doctor came down gravely. "I would recommend this gentleman to leave," he said. "I am Mr. Lepell's medical adviser. He is in my hands."

"You need not then have mentioned to him that I was here," said Severne, angrily. "I am not responsible for this scene, whoever may be."

"I am not going to be a puppet in my own house," went on the sick man, more frantically still. "I am not a child. Though I have brought it on myself, and made myself, and all belonging to me, miserable. My—my own folly! O, my child, heaven has sent me this punishment for what I have brought on you!"

She clung to him, and sobbed out. "No, no, dearest, don't say that. All will be right yet."

The servants were at the top of *their* stair, listening greedily. It was an almost ghastly scene.

"Go—go!" whispered Mrs. Lepell, imploringly. "You had better. Leave me to bear. The sight of you only irritates him. You will see me in the morning."

Severne irresolutely turned away, bowed his

head, and went out. With infinite difficulty they persuaded the unfortunate master of the house to go up.

Doctor Cameron came down to go away. It was past one. "A charming scene!" he said to her coldly. "A few more such, and your husband *will be out of this world!*"

She was looking at the fire, with her foot on the fender. "Am I accountable?" she said, turning on him, sharply.

"I would advise, for your own sake, that he should not darken this door, unless—unless——"

"Am I accountable?" she repeated, angrily. "Did I bid him come here! Ah, he is my friend, and *will be* my friend and protector! And you feel *that*, Doctor Cameron. I don't care if you are all leagued against me in this house *now*, and you at the head. We shall see a different state of things, now. He has been kind to me, and good, and will save me from my enemies!"

She said this with her eyes lifted to heaven, and looked really devotional and brilliant. The other hesitated a moment, and then said:—

"I do not wish to be your enemy—far from it—unless you choose to make me so. I *could* be as firm a friend as any other."

She made him an ironical curtsey. "You are *too* kind. But your piety and religion would be in the way. No, no."

He stamped his foot impatiently. "Always that!" he said.

"Always that!" she repeated. "Good night, Doctor Cameron. I am so happy. I never dreamed when I rose to-day what was in store for me. *My* friend is given back to me!"

She disappeared. He remained some minutes looking at the fire, with the same impatient expression, then went his way home.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW HEIR.

THINGS had indeed altered for Severne. That fortunate gentleman had sprung up from the last stage of desperate misery into happiness, opulence, and above all—what is almost more fascinating—into a future of the most delicious hopes. Station, rank, honours, and wealth, worked for and won in due course by the recognized aids — what are these beside the enchantment of the change from misery and squalor to ease and comfort—to the exquisite sense of being lifted from want and ruin to joy, happiness, and security! Down sink the gloomy walls of the dungeon—kindly faces, ministering angels, and friendly hands are about him; the flood of light pours in—the gold and silver, the sparkle, the effulgence, dazzle. What can compare with

the ravishing tumult of that moment, to be looked back to with a kind of wistful pleasure?

In no transformation scene that the most cunning of our scene-painters has devised—those gorgeous necromancers who revel in molten gold and silver, and spiritualised fairies, and all the rich celestial colours,—not one of these admirable gentlemen, I say, could have contrived a more startling change than what had taken place in the instance of Mr. Severne. Everyone was talking of it. The world, always good-natured in such matters, passed over the little awkward incident of that night which would otherwise have been a degradation, and only said it was “a perfect romance.”

It was all a romance, indeed. The deposition of Sir Parker Digby now quite secured—though that baronet put a bold front on, and talked of conspiracy and forgery, and firmly resolved to fight the battle (under the advice of his solicitors, who judiciously thought they could at least make terms);—the death of the heir to the Severne title and estates; the strange and sudden affection of

the present lord, an old man—as ladies soon found out—of poor health, and “much shaken” by the last blow;—these were blessings that no good fairy surely could have been more bountiful in devising. Nay, the same ladies had presently discovered that the present widow was in a miserable condition—half frantic with grief and illness; and though there was here a chance that might be fatal to our Severne’s prospects, yet experience had shown but too surely how precarious must be any calculations that are based on such premises. The poor lady was ill indeed; her mind was all but upset. The physicians were gloomy; and any lender of monies, with the facts fairly before him, would have joyfully taken our friend’s security and dealt with him liberally.

Happy child of fortune—favoured youth! Was it surprising that his return home to those who had always loved and esteemed him—to those who had always prized him for his amazing intellectual gifts, his nobility, generosity, powers of mind, and even wit, who had sought him and

held by him in his adversity and degradation—was it not natural that the advent of this surprising young man should be looked for anxiously in his own circles? The way in which Lady Mantower spoke of him was generous.

“Lord John Raby, I won’t hear a word. I shall quarrel with you if you do. He is my friend—my property.”

“Egad,” said Lord John, “she *would* like him for her property—pair him off with one of her shoulder-of-mutton daughters.”

Everyone enjoyed the discomfiture of the Parker Digbys, for who does not sympathise with the young and generous? who is not repelled by the unkindly, ungenial qualities of the near and stingy? The question was, when would the dear youth return?—would he wait till all was accomplished?—until the little chance which hung in the balance would be determined in his favour, and for which the prayers of many a pious matron were ascending to heaven—or, would the beatific vision be wearily protracted? No one knew. No woman could tell. Judge of the

cry of surprise and joy that arose when it went forth that he had returned—that he was indeed come. It did seem as though the prayers of the pious had been heard.

What grateful testimonials of sympathy were soon showered on him. The excuse was, it was such “an interesting case.” His table was soon covered with sweet notes—invitations to this and that, and the other festival. Old friends and old faces—was not *that* pleasing?—crowded about him and inconvenienced his movements. He was not bitter, as he might have been before, at this reappearance of “old friends and faces;” even in some instances, of old faces and friends, who, with a reckless indifference to truth, merely claimed to be old. For he, too, was changed. He had become gay, cheery, open, generous, and unsuspicious. Who would not, when so blessed? And besides, a friendly world, as we have mentioned, discovered in him fifty other virtues and perfections.

A kind of a dash of chivalry seemed to have entered into him—a light of enthusiasm was in

his eye. He was excellent company; and the old lord, shrunk and helpless, sitting in his chair, was never easy when he was away from him, and delighted in his society. What was the secret of this exaltation?

He had never forgotten the rude shock of that night—even the thought of the unclean touch of the bailiffs made him shudder and tremble. As he told his friend Selby later, he had actually—in that dreadful confinement—been thinking of suicide, and much longer meditation would have overset his wits. When, therefore, the fastenings of the cruel dungeon were burst open, and the kindly figure appeared to him—arrayed, too, as it was, in the spiritual dressing of the party—it seemed to take the shape of something supernatural—of some angel sent from heaven to free him; and on that night or morning, as he went down to Dover, he vowed—as we have seen—to be her slave and servant for life; and actually longed for some chance which would give him an opportunity of showing how deeply he was hers.

In the morning he came, as he had said, to Brooke Street. In that light she saw the change in him; his lightness and spirits; his handsome face—and that fulness of hope and joy. He was not thus struck with her. “What is this?” he said. “You look tired, and a little worn.” Our Jenny was pale, and a man with less penetration than Severne could readily divine the cause. “They are turning you into a nurse, or a slave, I see. So their persecution is weighing on your mind, as indeed it is no wonder. But, all in good time. You have your friends here now, and we shall do something for you. We shall not let you pine away in this fashion.” How grateful, tenderly grateful, she was for this ardent sympathy. How she looked, those who have made any fair acquaintance with her during this little narrative, may readily guess. Grateful indeed to one “who was alone in that house,” must have been such words of kindness. “I did not sleep well,” she said. “I *do* not sleep well, but that is no matter. The excitement of last night was a little too much, otherwise I have

learned my duties, and can watch as well as any nurse."

"But that is what you should not do," he said; "and must not do. Does he sleep well? Tell me about him, and that dry, domineering doctor I saw last night."

"Hush!" she said, looking round. "He is here, upstairs; and I am sure knows that you are here. He is the master of the house, you know."

"Insufferable!" said Severne, impatiently. "He is a mere adventurer, I can see; one of those people who get undue influence. But I'll match him. The slightest impertinence or freedom to you, and send for me, I shall know how to punish him. It will never do to have all this going on. We must get your husband out of this, and that will be the first step."

"How?" said she, wondering.

"Change of air. Don't you see: good for him, good for you. He is wasting away here, pent up in this close London. It is the only thing to do him good. His mind, too, I can see from last

night, is morbidly excited. The green fields and green trees—those are the true remedies. He shall go, and take his favourite doctor with him, if he likes.”

“How kind—how good of you,” she said. “It never can be done though.”

“Why not?” he said.

“Because they will think I have some scheme or design in it. That man will not allow it; and indeed we want no change.”

“The change for you,” he said, “I meant to be a clear house and freedom from anxiety, and some rest. I should propose *your* staying here.”

She smiled, and shook her head. “Not to be thought of even,” she said. “Hopeless.”

“Nothing of the kind. I shall manage it. Leave it to me. By the way, your friend, servant, and slave has been thinking of you when away. Here are some Italian trifles I brought with me. What, indeed, could I give that would show all that I feel to you? It would be no more than the faintest proof of the life-long obligation I shall be always under to you.”

She could hardly answer. "You overpower me," she murmured; and indeed she might well be overpowered by the gorgeous show that was now being spread out before her. Who does not admire the exquisite *spécialité* of Naples—the delicately tinted coral treasures—mounted and set with a delicacy as rare as the tone is tender? Not of the very faint "washed-out" paleness which a morbid taste used to hanker after, but a pure yet warm pink, which a more correct and natural canon has latterly established—Italian fingers are alone delicate and fanciful enough to set these treasures in their own natural attitudes. What lady's heart could resist being entranced by such a show as the generous Severne spread out on the table,—Necklace, earrings, brooches combs—what not? It suited well, too, with the tone of our heroine's hair and face.

Naturally she was almost frightened, as well as dazzled: for as we know, the world in one of its arbitrary fits of morality has chosen to forbid the acceptance of such testimonials, save under special relations; or if such acceptance be persisted in,

attaches the unkindest and most ungenerous presumptions. Perhaps there is too much of this despotism—and our Jenny was hardly prepared to enfranchise herself as yet.

“I cannot take these splendid things,” she said, shrinking. “Oh, indeed, no! What will they say?”

“That I would wish to be grateful; that I would try and show I like you—but fail. Are we so little grown up that we are to mind what ‘they’ say? I have had enough of that. Besides, why tell them?”

“Oh, I dare not,” she went on. “I will take one—a little thing as a souvenir—always to be cherished,” and she picked out a brooch. She was firm—resolute almost. “Even that man who comes here——”

“What! our spy?” he said, smiling.

“Yes; he would know it in ten minutes. He has some mysterious art of divining. No. I dare not.”

Severne was not displeased. He shut up his treasures. “I shall keep them for you,” he said.

Suddenly appeared at the door Helen, who had fluttered down with some message. Had she been sent? The little caskets were lying about; some were open. The two disdained any concealment. For Severne that sad face had always an interest, and he greeted her warmly.

"It is a long time since I have seen you. A good deal has happened since I was here. Tell us about Mr. Lepell; how is he to-day?"

She answered timorously that he was "*a little better*"—that sad invalid's formula which has been spoken and written in a thousand dismal houses where death was slowly creeping upstairs.

"We have been talking of him," said Severne, eagerly. "He should mend faster. I have been laying out a plan—and I may do so, for I look on myself as an old friend. Why not remove him from this place to the country? Change of air does wonders."

The young girl started, and looked from one to the other. "No, no," she said.

"Are you afraid of your friend the doctor?"

he asked. "Perhaps he would not give his permission. Then I tell you what, Miss Helen, you are taking a serious responsibility. You should have the best advice, the best physicians in London; and instead, I find this raw, rough man, not old enough to have experience, and rude and uncouth enough to keep any patient sick. You should have Sir Duncan Dennison, or Mudie, or some man of repute. I tell you plainly, under such *laissez faire* principles you will see your father glide gradually out of the world. I am as sure of it as I sit here."

The young girl, aghast, stood looking at him, as if he was pronouncing a death warrant. A new truth seemed to have flashed upon her. "No, no! spare him—save him!" she cried; "it is not too late."

Another step was heard outside. The doctor they had been talking about entered; his face was pale, his lips trembling, and there was a bitter contraction about his lips. Yet he spoke calmly.

"Mr. Lepell wishes to see you," he said, to

Helen, "he is dressed. He *would* get up, though he never closed his eyes all last night."

"Oh, listen to this, Dr. Cameron," said the young girl, passionately, "and we must try and get papa to do it or he will die—he will die."

"Do what, Miss Lepell?" he said, his lips trembling still. "What has this council settled on?"

"Something to save the life of the master of this house," said Severne, "and which, if I mistake not, Doctor Cameron knows perfectly, though he does ask for information. He is a *religious* man, so of course he will tell the truth."

The Doctor's face became yet more pale, as he looked from one to the other.

"Thank heaven, I have grace enough not to be ashamed to do that. The door was open, and you spoke loud. I *did* hear your scheme."

"I knew it," said Severne, smiling, "your face is not well trained."

"God forbid it should be," he said, vehemently. "But this scheme, I tell you plainly, I do not approve of. This is not a case for change of air."

He cannot leave the house ; he is too weak for that."

"Well, let competent judges decide on that. Send for Doctor Mudie or Sir Duncan Dennison, or some man of *that class*. I am surprised you haven't suggested it yourself."

"I still say I do not approve of Mrs. Lepell's plan, and Mr. Lepell does not approve of it. There is no obstacle to her taking change of air. This may be *uncouth or boorish*," he added, with a voice that trembled, "but it is time to speak plainly."

Mrs. Lepell was going to speak, but Severne stopped her.

"Let me tell this gentleman that the suggestion of this plan came from me entirely. And let me tell him also that one part of the plan was that *she* should stay here. Her health must not be selfishly sacrificed. I, who have been away, can see the change in her, which no one seems to think of."

Again the Doctor's voice trembled. "Now I see what the scheme was. That was it—was it ?

—to clear the house. I begin to see ;”—his eyes looked from one jewel case to the other—“yes, I begin to see.”

“Oh, papa, papa !” broke from Helen, “why have you done this ? You will kill yourself !”

CHAPTER VI.

GIVING WAY.

ALL looked to the door. It was indeed an apparition of the miserable invalid tottering in, leaning on a stick. The usual feverish fire was in his eye.

“As you were all down,” he said, “and I have been left alone, I have come down to see for myself. Good morning, Mr. Severne. I am afraid last night I was a little short and put out. But I have not been at all well. I am *not* at all well ever since that accident. And no one seems to know what is the matter with me. But my clever friend here promises to get me well.”

In that group was strange confusion. No one knew what to say. He went on, with an affectation of gaiety.

“I think I have been too much shut up. I am

sure if I stirred about more I should be better. Indeed, I determined last night, after you were gone, Mr. Severne, and lay awake I may say the whole night, to begin a little to-day. And so here I am, come down. And if," he added, with a strange look, "there should be any parties or visitors here, I may take my place and see what is going on, and be amused like every one else. Do you approve of *that*, my dear?"

Mrs. Lepell answered, "What I have always thought and wished for, if you had strength, dearest"—(a sort of twitch or start passed over his frame at that word). "Why, even as you came in we were talking of change of air and scene for you—of your going to some sweet country spot where you would get well and recover your spirits. But Dr. Cameron——"

"Send me to the country?" he repeated, looking round at the Doctor.;

"The house would not be broken up," the latter said calmly, "It is proposed that Mrs. Lepell should remain *here*."

The sick man half rose. "Send me to the

country—I see, I see, I see it *now*. An excellent idea! But I'll not do it. I'll die here first, as, indeed, I deserve to die, for I have brought all this on myself. I shall not quit this house until they carry me over the threshold. What are these? Where do *they* come from?"

They saw he was growing more and more excited every moment. Jenny threw a reproachful appeal to the Doctor, but she thought she saw a bitter pitilessness in his eyes.

"What are these things?" Mr. Lepell repeated in a trembling voice. "Are they *presents*?"

Severne struck in eagerly and soothingly. "No, no, sir; they were meant to be some trifles for Mrs. Lepell from Naples."

The Doctor opened one, as if in curiosity. "Trifles!—yes, indeed; to what perfection they have brought this work!"

Mr. Lepell was opening and shutting the clasp feverishly. His eyes seemed to glare at Severne.

"But, unhappily," Severne went on, "Mrs. Lepell will not do me the honour to accept them.

Some scruples, which I am sure Mr. Lepell will be the first to——”

“Most proper; you are really so kind and generous,” said the latter, in the same gasping way. “You see—it was—worth while—coming down. I have done very well for the first day. I was right in taking your hint, my dear Cameron. What would I do without you?”

“O religion,” said Severne, as if to himself, “how many things are done in thy name!”

“I have made a beginning, anyway,” he said, rising, “and to-morrow I shall be stronger; and I am determined if there is any little pleasant thing going on to have my share in it. I think you were right—quite right—and Mr. Severne will take home his jewels, *for the present, at least*. I fear I must go up again. Your arm, my pet,” to Hélén.

She flew to him. “Oh! papa,” she said, in her piteous, tender voice, “you will do what he says, and go away. All this is killing you.”

He shook himself free. “Are you in it too?”

he said, with an agony of reproach, "then God help me, indeed!" Then seeing her face—"No, I don't mean *that*. I didn't mean to say that, my poor, faithful, injured child."

After she was gone, the remaining actors in this painful scene looked at each other for a few moments.

"Why do you not follow your patient? I must say, Doctor Cameron, I admire the practical character of your religion—that stroke of sending him down here, at the risk of his life, and the little remark about the coral, was truly apostolic." Mrs. Lepell looked at him with a quiet scorn and triumph.

"A rude 'uncouth' fellow can act but according to his lights," the other answered.

"I am tired of all this," said Severne, rising impatiently. "However, this I am resolved on. I shall send Sir Duncan here to-morrow. I know him very well. If Doctor Cameron chooses to refuse him admittance, well and good. We shall know what to do then. But, I presume, when the lady of the house—However, I shall be

here myself, or come with him. That will be better. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Lepell, we shall take care of you, never fear."

The Doctor grew white, as he was thus addressed. His lips trembled more and more. Severne went out with an air of almost jeering triumph. Then the doctor spoke, and spoke slowly :—

"You have a wonderful champion in him?"

"Oh, yes! he is *my* friend. He can do anything. And how noble and handsome he looked. I am proud of my champion, indeed. Everything above-board—no insidious little strokes in the dark."

"I suppose you despise me," the Doctor said, still slowly, "the uncouth boor, who degrades himself by such arts? Well, indeed you may. I deserve *all* contempt. Why do you drive me to these things? Yes, you despise me. I know you do."

"Not at all," she said, changing her manner. "To be candid, I *fear* you more. Indeed, I must say, we have been baiting you sadly. But you drive us to it."

"*Us!*" he repeated. "Partnership—drive you to it with my uncouth behaviour. *Us*, indeed! I warn you to take care how you are going on!"

"I profess not to understand you, Doctor Cameron," she said, lightly, and tripped out of the room, leaving the Doctor alone.

Was it Patty, or one of the servants, that reported, that night, that she heard a strange passionate voice in the drawing-room, and peeping in, had seen the Doctor walking about, with his hands lifted, praying aloud, in a sort of frantic way? There was perfect truth in this, and he was making agitated appeals to this effect:—

"O Heaven! stand by my wretched and corrupt heart. Let me not give way in the hour of struggle—and lose in a moment what I have sought to win for years. Help me! Help me! Save me!"

Meanwhile, the unhappy Miss Palmer was lying on her sick bed—more sick at heart, perhaps, than she was in body. At least, she did not feel her pains and sufferings. The thought of her cruel abandonment was quite too much for

her : her health was never of the best—though envious mothers, reasoning from her colour and height, pronounced her, in coarse language, to be “strong as a horse :” and it was not unlikely that she might have died under this cruel treatment, but for a fortunate turn in events. No young woman has, indeed, ever died of pure love, as has been insinuated often enough in the novels, plays, and poems ; but, more likely, of the mortification, despondency, and loss of hope, which follows in the train. As for youths, and for the selfish youth of *our* day, the notion of *their* taking to their beds to die of anything but legitimate sickness, is simply an outrage on the good sense and civilisation of our glorious, complete, and perfect nineteenth century.

Her mother, indeed, felt acutely the mortification of the situation. Were there ever cards so badly played ? Too soon, indeed, the joyful news had reached her of the splendid Severne rehabilitation and almost apotheosis. Worse than all, there was no chance of repairing this foolish blunder : for she was wise enough to know that

there was no profit to be found in clumsy excuses, explanations, and the like. Who cannot explain, be specious, and ingenious, even in the very teeth of the sternest and most staring of facts? Who cannot be sorry and penitent? Bad as the prospect was, she saw that the balance of profit lay on the side of dignity, and consistency, and steady adherence to the path she had chosen. Therefore, she had neither written excuses, nor sent to Severne. But she was a clever woman, all the time: and had that incomparable self-denial, which can *wait*, and wait, and does not grow fretful, and require action of some kind, and can well endure the protraction of suspense. This is the "game" that has won everywhere, since the world started.

The unhappy daughter secretly fancied, as she lay there, that some exertion was being made to repair the cruel error. That in the foreign mail-bags were passionate appeals, or generous forgiveness. Nearly all her pride had gone, just so much remained as made her disinclined to ask her mother anything as to what she had done.

The first gleam of hope was the coming of that Doctor Cameron. When he mentioned that he had been found at "Brooke Street," those words worked like a charm, and made her start up eagerly. She knew the number well. That house was, for her, the cave of the wicked sorceress, who had undone her.

The Doctor was greatly struck with her beauty, and from her restless eyes and excitement soon discovered the true state of things. This investigation was quite to his peculiar taste. His kind sympathy and manner, grim and stiff though it was, quite won on the young girl, and drew her confidence. She herself—her face, her dejection—comprised the whole story; and very soon, when she had brought herself to mention the name of "Severne," he had made out for himself much of the little history. He was very kind, very good, and very skilful in his professional way: like most thoughtful men of few words, if words well weighed before they were spoken, those words became doubly valuable. He saw the cold worldliness of the mother, and what

little community there was between them: and it was then that he happily thought of the other young girl, who was all but alone in her home, and who wanted friendship and sympathy quite as much. There was foundation enough for an acquaintance in the meeting of Helen's father with the Palmers at Digby.

"I know a little sister of charity," he said and then checked himself a little hastily. He did not relish *that* shape of ministration. "I mean, there is a young girl who knows of you, and about you, and would have an interest in you. She is not very happy where she is. Her home has not too many comforts, and she would be glad to see and know you better."

When he said that she came from "Brooke Street," the sick young girl eagerly caught at the proposal—it was a link, a little plank to cling to—for she had an instinct that her secret enemy would contrive some communication with her lost lover.

In this way, then, was the introduction managed. In a day or two the two girls were affec-

tionate friends. For they had that one topic of common interest—that one object from which they both shrank; and—which, let it be said, is a yet greater and firmer bond of intimacy—a common dislike. How it strikes the waters from the rock! What enthusiasm, indulgence, and encouragement it kindles: what generous agreement it fosters; and in what pleasant loquacity—mounting at times even to eloquence—it whiles the moments away! They talk of wearing the heart upon the sleeve, but two girls together—one in bed sick, suffering, and disappointed; the other beside her, holding her hand, and wretchedness in her soul and a nightmare waiting her at home—why, they take each other's heart into their hands, and feast their eyes on the minutest anatomy of each ventricle. And thus the two gentle children—for such they almost were—interchanged their hopes, joys, miseries, and suspicions. And thus Helen told openly of what was going on in the house, and Miss Palmer wearily rehearsed her sad tale, and what she so fervently suspected. Between the two, a scarcely

flattering portrait was worked out of the mistress of Seventy-five Brooke Street.

But now Severne was returned home, and on the day after—Helen had flown to her friend with the news—the old brightness—flash more than brightness—came into the sick girl's eye. There was joy and hope again, though in truth the face of matters was not very much changed; yet the fatal barrier of distance and time was removed.

Something *might* be done now. The ministering angel was in a flutter, and looked on herself as a chosen—a divinely chosen agent to bring things to a happy issue. Though, indeed, to do her justice, she was not conscious of the mixed motives which were working within her, or that the happy issue, which should bring Severne back to her friend's feet, was bound up seriously with her own.

"Leave it all to me," she said, enthusiastically. "I shall manage it. I can see already that he likes me, and feels for me. He has spoken so kindly to me already."

"But she—your——?" said the other, raising herself eagerly.

Helen dropped her eyes. "Yes," she said, with hesitation. "He was very glad to see her. 'She *saved* him,' he says; 'and he will never forget it.'"

The brightness fled from the other's face. She sank back. "Oh! I should be well," she cried, "and strong! Though, indeed, if I were, how should I fight this battle against her! When I *was* well, how powerless and foolish I was!"

"Leave it to me, dear," said the other, earnestly. "I am strong, and can fight the battle for you until you get well. And you will not be foolish again." For it need hardly be said that Helen had been told the whole story of that unlucky pride and bearing of indifference with which Severne's pettishness and despotism had been met.

"Still," added Miss Palmer, "why should he have been so unkind, and turned against me so cruelly? I wrote to him—though I did not tell mamma—offering him everything I had. Why,

I would sooner have died than they should have touched him, or that he should have suffered a moment. What had I done after all?—gone to a party. To which I was, indeed, forced to go.”

All this time was working silently in Helen's little head a certain scheme of a bold and daring sort, and from which she expected the most remarkable result. It was for her friend. She would carry it out that very day; and when she took her leave—a ceremony accompanied with abundance of kisses—she had made up her mind “to make friends,” as it is called, with Severne; and on that basis plead earnestly with him for her sick friend.

Mrs. Lepell had come down—now in great spirits—charmingly dressed, to go on some expedition. As she was descending the stair she heard Mr. Lepell's room-door open above. “Ah! I knew,” she said, with a smile. “Let us wait and see.”

Dr. Cameron came down slowly. “You are going out?” he said.

"To some gaiety, of course," she said, pleasantly. "That is the sin, now."

"I have no right to inquire; but as you say it, I do know. And I tell you I can see what is beginning, and it is not fitting or proper."

"Nor moral—nor religious," said she, smiling, "to go out to shop?"

"Shopping, indeed," he said, scornfully. "I am not so blind as that. You are going to see that man—the man from whom you condescend to take presents."

She drew herself up. "Don't slander me," she said. "You know the truth of all that as well as I do. But it is hopeless to expect grace or politeness."

"I have never failed in that, I trust—at least not intentionally."

"It comes to the same thing," she said, coldly. "You have guessed right. That penetration of yours, which is a little wonderful to me, I confess, has served you. Well, I *am* going to see Mr. Severne—my true and kind friend; that likes and esteems me; that will stand by me and stand

up for me; that I myself stood by in his adversity. Yes, I am proud of that, Dr. Cameron. Look as close as you like; apply all your fine religious tests, and you will find nothing to be ashamed of in that. He is my friend—my *one* friend in this house; and I am proud of having such a one.”

With this little speech came the colour into her cheeks, and she stood looking at him haughtily; and, we may admit, having a good deal of reason on her side. He did not answer for a moment.

“I never can persuade you,” he said, slowly, “that I do not want to be your enemy. I would be even your friend, *quite as much as he is*, only you are determined to prevent me.”

“It is time enough to think of that,” she said, carelessly, “when you show some proof of your good-will. I like deeds—not professions, Dr. Cameron. If you really do feel as you say, then cease persecuting and misrepresenting everything. I do not understand even now! I must set off on these journeys by myself.”

“A great hardship,” he said, with a sneer.

"It is," she said, gravely. "Perhaps you mean I am old enough to be going about the town by myself. See what I am driven to."

He hesitated. "If *I* were to offer to——"

"*You!*" she said, smiling. "*What* a proposal! The grave, serious, *religious* Dr. Cameron turning into a beau. No, no!—there is an incongruity in *that!* Besides, you do not deserve it as yet!"

He was colouring; but she added hastily, "Seriously, it is very kind of you; and I should be very glad, indeed, to be escorted by you. Pray, come. It is only a short way."

His face lighted up with pleasure. Then suddenly he shook his head, "As you say it would be incongruous, there would be a comic notion in it, perhaps. You would have a fine opportunity for describing it to your friend. No; I have my duties here."

He turned away angrily. "Weak creature that I am!" he said, as he went up.

Mrs. Lepell returned in an hour. Mr. Severne had had two lady-visitors that morning; and the waiters at Starridge's highly fashionable and

costly hotel—an establishment with all the retiring incognito of a private Royal brougham—had shown up two lady-visitors. His lordship was ill, aged, and in bed. Severne was down below answering letters, and settling business matters. His own affairs had been long since happily arranged. One of the most pleasant moments was when Messrs. Payne and Hardy came grovelling, almost with tears—to his feet—begging him *not* to pay them—never to think of them at all, provided he would forgive them for the past. Severne was magnanimous, and raised the prostrate tradesmen like Alexander receiving the family of Darius.

“Mr. Parker,” he said, “will arrange with you. All I ask of you—as you are sorry—is not to be hard on the next young fellow that gets into a difficulty with you. Be a little more of—a—and less of the—Well, no matter.” The repentant tailors would have abjectly taken an oath that, for the future, they would be gentle to all, and were dismissed, fancying they had cleverly condoned the past. But Severne said he had a duty to society.

The world is very strange and capricious in its way. Had Severne remained in his state of ruin, and been overwhelmed by those gentlemen, it would have been all in the usual course, but his restoration to prosperity altered everything. *Then* the eyes of fashion were opened to their villainy, and the decay of the well-known tailoring firm may be said to have begun from that hour.

Severne, busy with his writing, was told that a lady wished to see him—"a young person," indeed, the waiter said. At Starridge's all the staff of the house were too well-trained to see, hear, speculate, or remark, where they had a guarantee in their guest.

The Rev. Mr. Sterne might have received his grisette to show laces, try on gloves, take up stitches in his black silk stockings, &c., all day long without protest. The "young person" was shown up, therefore, with all the respect due to a duchess. He started with surprise when he saw her.

"My dear Miss Lepell—a visit from you!

How is the patient? Sit down—tell me all about it.”

She was almost frightened. “Indeed, sir,” she said, “I don’t know what you will think of my coming here. But, *indeed*, I could not help it. And I know you are so kind and good—you will forgive——”

“Forgive!” he said, laughing. “Forgive a charming and engaging young lady for doing me such an honour! Seriously, what can we do for you? You know you must consider me of the family; and your—Mrs. Lepell, I mean—I never can do enough for her and hers.”

He looked round as he said this, and settled the fire. When we turned again, he saw a change in her face. That name had sent light and fire to her eyes. “O, Mr. Severne,” she began, “I have come from a sick bed—a poor, unhappy girl. And oh! if *you only knew all, you would pity her*. It was not her own fault.”

Severne did not care to be man of the world enough to misunderstand. He answered hastily, “That is all too late, Miss Lepell. All that is

over, and for ever. I can't enter on it at all. It is very creditable to you, and I can understand how you feel for your friend."

"Oh!" she went on, "there was some mistake. Indeed there was! She was always the same—always!"

"My dear child," said Severne, coldly, "you can't understand these things; you are too young, and too artless an ambassador. With anyone else I would not enter on the matter at all."

"What! I have done wrong? I know I have!" she said, clasping her hands. "Don't speak to me in that way."

"I am *not* angry with you," he said. "But as for *that* family—never! I shall never forget that night; the memory of all I was made to suffer is burnt into my very heart. I wrote to her from that—that den. I wanted nothing from them—only a line of sympathy. But it reached them at their party—at their music, and they could not leave that."

"Never! never!" said she, starting. "She

told me herself 'they never heard it till late the next day.' "

"Ah! that is *their* story ; the regular excuse, my dear child. By that time the news of my good fortune was pretty well known. *She*—Mrs. Lepell—required no letter to tell her. True regard has an instinct of its own."

"But," said Helen, bewildered, "You *did* write to *her*. She did receive a letter there—from you, as I thought."

Severne stopped, a little uneasy. "Did she tell you so?"

"I think so."

"It was another letter, I suppose. That is no matter. You know how she behaved. I should have been raging mad, perhaps, before morning, had she not come and generously released me. She could find the money, and I do not blush to tell it."

"Money!" said the young girl, hesitating. "She has none—could have none. For poor papa—his illness has run away with a great deal, and we were greatly pressed with bills at that

time; and I remember she told us that week that there were only a few pounds in the house."

But the young girl saw it was hopeless, and the despondency in her face touched him.

"I am not *in the least* angry," he said; "in fact it is kind of you, and well meant. But I am not to be shaken. I did admire her, and do; I loved her, and perhaps do still. But all that is over. It was, too, a system too base and *too* cruel."

"If I prove it to you?" she said, as a last chance, and putting up her face with a wistful entreaty it was hard to resist.

"We shall see," he said, smiling. "Now we shall get you a cab and send you home."

CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN'S PHYSICIAN.

THERE was not ten minutes between this visit of the two ladies. Mrs. Lepell was shown up by the ministering serfs at Starridge's with the same polite composure. She found her young hero with a little doubt and trouble on his face. The words of the young girl had sunk a little deeper than she or he fancied.

"Miss Helen has been here," he said, "to plead for her new friends, the Palmers. She sits with them, it seems. Our friend 'the spy' has brought them together."

Mrs. Lepell almost started, for this *was* news to her. "A good deal has taken place since you were away," she said, sadly. "They are spreading a regular net about me. Had it not been for

your return, what should I have done? Setting my daughter against me!—that is moral and religious.”

“ Their story now is, that she never got my letter—was that right?—or until late the next day.”

Mrs. Lepell again nearly started, but curiously enough she could think of a little bit of evidence that was conclusive. “ Why, I saw the man come in myself,” she said, eagerly. “ I saw him standing in the hall. Had he not a white coat on?”

“ Conclusive—convincing!” said Severne, half sadly. “ The very same; that was my messenger. What deceit!—what a conspiracy! The worldly mother has indeed corrupted the unfortunate girl. Forgive me for listening a moment to these calumnies. Even out of *their* mouths came a proof of your disinterestedness and generosity,—that you had denied even some family wants to send that money to me——”

This she saw was also put, doubtfully, as a sort of question. And with a sort of warmth she broke out: “ They have told that, too, have they?

Why, it seems I have been on my trial this morn-
in. Yes, then, I own it. There was some money
for another purpose, and I gave to a more pres-
sing one."

"I am ashamed," said he; "I blush for myself.
Though I am glad it has happened, for I shall
know for the future. Not that I am angry with
her. Don't let us talk any more of this. If ever
I doubt again, or listen to such folly, remind me
of this."

"They will not stop at *that*," she said, sadly.
"What about the doctor, Sir Duncan Dennison?"

"He will be with you to-day—I shall bring him
myself; that will turn our saint's flank. And
you must see him, too, my dear Mrs. Lepell.
We must take care of you. In fact, that is the
plan I have; he comes to *see* you, you under-
stand."

Starridge's waiters saw the distinguished Se-
verne see down to the door the good-looking
lady without the least surprise. But Starridge's
waiters had long since lost all sense of surprise.
The foreign Princes and "Ducs" always put up

with them. Mrs. Lepell came home full of thought, and perhaps of anxiety; but in the meeting with her step-daughter, no one would have detected the slightest air of what was even *aigre*.

At three o'clock a plunging and scampering of horses, brought up suddenly on their haunches—a fashion which Sir Duncan's coachmen were all trained to, causing a good deal of fretting and torture to the noble creatures he always drove—told that the Queen's Physician was at the door. He bounded from the carriage, flew up the steps, so that passers-by invariably constructed an exciting legend of danger of death, and not a second to be lost. Severne was with him. In the drawing-room was Doctor Cameron.

"I am sorry," he said, almost as they entered, "that Sir Duncan Dennison should have had the inconvenience of coming. But Mr. Lepell has firmly resolved that he will not see any physician. It's no use now."

"Mr. who?" said Sir Duncan, coolly. "Who the deuce is he? I have nothing to do with him."

I've come to see a——" The doctor was a little taken back; he saw Severne smiling. At that moment entered Mrs. Lepell. "Ah, here's my patient," he said. "Now, madam, what's the matter—headache?" Then Severne eagerly drew him over, and the three went into consultation.

"She takes no care of herself," said Severne. "She wastes her strength nursing this invalid. She says she does not sleep at night. Now, Sir Duncan, you must do your best and reason with her, too."

"Humph," said the doctor, looking at her steadily. "Good colour—eyes bright. Hope, my dear madam, I'll have the pleasure of taking you down to dinner soon."

Severne went over to Doctor Cameron, and in his blunt, off-hand way, said, "Surely he can't be serious. What does it mean? And let me tell you, Doctor Cameron, in a case like this, which may end we do not know how, it is incurring rather a grave responsibility; I would not do it in your place."

The Doctor's lips trembled. "You assume

rather too much," he said. "I have nothing to do with the matter. *This* is only more of the favourable opinion you have formed of me, Mr. Severne."

"Well, frankly, you know what I think, Doctor. You stand for one interest in this house, I am for both interests. If I have done you wrong, I ask your pardon. But let us be open. This is a sick man's whim; you should know how to deal with it. Ah! there goes Miss Helen—let me speak to her." He hurried out of the room after her. "I knew she would," he said, coming back.

She was down again in a few seconds. "Papa will see the doctor," she said very eagerly, "if he will come up now."

"See me?" said Sir Duncan. "Humph! very odd this. I doubt if I shall see him." And he looked suspiciously at Doctor Cameron. However, he did go up, with the same "life and death" manner, though there was no more leisurely gossip in town.

"There must have been some extraordinary mistake," said Severne, when he was gone up.

"There was none," said the Doctor, excitedly. "But I see it is time for me to leave this house, where I should never have entered. It is no place for me."

Severne and Mrs. Lepell exchanged glances. Severne, in his gay, careless tone, said, "What, beaten already? Give up the battle so easily—only a two days' struggle?"

The Doctor saw the look of intelligence; it seemed to make him wince. "It does not follow that the struggle is over, for all that," he said.

After a long absence Sir Duncan came down again. "I don't like his state at all," said he. "How long has this been going on? He tells me he has not slept for three nights; and if you don't take care he will not sleep for many more. He is excited. There is some strain upon his mind. He has been worked up into this fever."

"What do you recommend, Sir Duncan?" said Severne. "Should he be shut up in this way, moping and brooding as he is, or should every one try to make him cheerful, and enjoy life?"

“No harm in that,” said the other; “and it will be better for my other patient here. As for the sleeplessness, I shall send you a new remedy which I got from an Italian doctor; the most wonderful discovery it is. But I can only trust to Doctor Cameron, here; it’s too ticklish a thing for common hands. Keep his mind cheerful, too. Above all, I can see he has morbid ideas on religion—something in the line of election, reprobation, and that sort of thing. If that gets near him, good-bye to him.” He took Mrs. Lepell and Doctor Cameron. “Look here,” he said; “I shall send you this nostrum; but you must be most cautious. Two drops more would be dangerous. One draught for the night, and no more, then, for two or three nights. And above all, keep them under lock and key—for patients get to like it; so mind and be very cautious. We must get you well, at all events,” he said, approvingly, to Mrs. Lepell. “No fretting or fussing, my dear.”

All this time the Doctor had said nothing. Sir Duncan, as he gave his instructions, kept looking

at him from head to foot; then, as he went down with Severne, said—

“Strange hang-dog fellow, that medico; sulky beggar, I’ll swear. I like her, though. I see trouble *there*—moody, morbid husband, and all that. A little clique against her.”

“Exactly,” said Severne, eagerly. “I pity her from my soul. She is a noble creature, and I wish I could tell you of the *noble* things she has done. She has the finest, noblest nature!”

The doctor looked at him askance, as who should say, “I see how things lie in *this* quarter, too!” but he did not make so direct a remark. He said, “Egad, I like her, too; and we must freshen the poor thing up a little. There’s my Lady Dennison giving a dinner next week; if we could get her to that——?”

The doctor went his way.

“Now,” said Severne, coming back impetuously to the drawing-room, “you have all heard what Sir Duncan says, and we must all help to carry it out, cheerfully and resolutely; and I can see in our friend’s face, over there, that he is not going to

be an obstacle. And for a beginning. Come over here, Mrs. Lepell; I want a secret council, for *you* are a patient, too."

She went over with delight and alacrity; she was very happy indeed. The gloomy eyes of the Doctor followed her over, as she took part in this conference from which *he* was excluded.

The young girl looked on Sir Duncan's verdict as highly favourable, (she had not been told what he really thought,) and she ran to Doctor Cameron with delight. "O! I am so glad, and so happy! *Now* we shall get papa quite well again!"

"Yes," said he; but the moody eyes were still over at the window, watching that delighted confidence of the two, and his ears were strained listening for a word. He just caught the sounds "Duchess' Theatre," and then a sudden dropping of the voice, and a suspicious looking round *at him*. He hardly heard Helen and her affectionate raptures over the good news. He was thinking, "I am too *uncouth*, I suppose. They make their arrangements together to exclude me. They had better

not. If I chose I could soon confound all their plans!" The intelligence, the meaning looks between the two, their perfect good spirits, all jarred on him. All that day he was silent, and in ill humour.

Before Severne left, Mr. Lepell had come down, his eyes wild and rolling, and a strange fevered look about his face. His wild eyes went straight to the two so pleasantly talking in the window, and seemed to shoot through them. But he walked up straight to Severne with his hand out.

"I owe you," he said, "the visit of that clever doctor—not but that I am quite satisfied with my friend here. It was very thoughtful and kind of you to bring him; and I am sure I shall get well. *I am longing to be well.*" He said this in a prolonged sort of moan, that went to the hearts of all his friends there. "I am so weary of being shut up here," he went on. "After all, if it is to go on, there is but little difference."

"My dear sir," said Severne, "that is what he said. You are *not* to be shut up. If you would only take interest in all that is going on,

and enjoy life a little, you would get well soon enough. Just have a few people here, and see any that come; and——”

“Ah! that is good advice,” said the other, gazing at him with an intense stare, which was yet absent.

“Yes,” said Doctor Cameron, looking at Severne steadily; “and it will do good to others also, Sir Duncan said. It will *cheer up and amuse Mrs. Lepell also*, and restore *her* to health.”

The sick man started. “Ah! I see,” he said, almost fiercely; “I mean—most natural, indeed, and proper—quite so! Indeed we shall manage it. I’ll think it over.”

He went upstairs slowly. When he was gone Severne turned to the Doctor and said sternly, “I understood your last speech perfectly. It was clever and *Christian, too*. How likely, too, to *soothe* your patient, and keep him calm.”

The Doctor said nothing, but walked away.

“He is very odd,” said she; “I begin to be afraid of him.”

“More malignant than odd,” said he, warmly.

"The ingenuity of his last speech was truly pious. Mark my words, that man will give trouble yet. He has some design of plundering your poor husband, and we have interfered."

When Severne was gone, Doctor Cameron came down a moment to fetch something—to look for a book. Very gently she offered to help him.

"You are better, then?" he said, with one of his stiff, bitter smiles; "quite restored to health? When did this grievous sickness come on? Take care, Mrs. Lepell; take care. There is no crime so heinous as that of mocking a Heaven that gives you only too many blessings."

"Do you know, Doctor Cameron, I am weary of all this preaching," she said. Mr. Severne is quite a relief. I must send for him again, if you go on."

His eyes flashed. "Yes, and get him and his doctor to come and prescribe *amusement* for your sickness. Prescribe meetings—opportunities—secret talks! I understand. Charming doctor, that!"

"*Sir!*" said she, rising, "you are fast bringing things to an end. I *will* not endure it. If

he were here, you dare not speak so. You know you are secure in the helplessness of a sick husband, to whom I *dare* not complain for fear of excitement. Heaven help me! What have I done that I am exposed to this?" and tears came—or it seemed to him that tears came—into her eyes.

Very quickly his tone changed. "Forgive me," he said. "I have been chafed and worried. You set me this example. Don't—*don't*," he almost pleaded. "Don't do it. It is wrong and cruel; and he is a vain, empty, foolish man."

"Mr. Severne is a friend—a *real* rational friend. He does not trouble me with these extraordinary harangues. What am I doing, pray?"

"Ah! you can't carry it off all day long. Why do you join them? I with such a wretched, untrained, unsubdued, *wicked* nature——"

"*You?*" she said, in surprise. "Why, I thought you were specially——"

"There again—going to sneer; join with *him* in that. It galls—it chafes me to see it; I can't endure it. You a wife, with a girl like a daughter,

and to go on in that way. What did you arrange with *him—for to-night?* ”

She looked at him with wonder. “Arrange for to-night?” she repeated. “I am afraid this is a little *too* much. *Must* I answer? Now *really* I think this is all a *little* childish: unworthy of a *great mind*—of a good mind. Don’t you see, too,” she went on, in a tone of good-humoured expostulation—“don’t you see that the natural result of all this watching and worrying of poor me must be to associate *you* with everything that is unpleasant and disagreeable. You would not like that, I know.”

She kept looking at him with a kind of amused expression.

He was fast losing his readiness—his blunt and offensive manner, his rough tone of speech. Was it that some greater absorbing ideal had clogged his thoughts foolishly and stupidly? Was it that a flush of absurd shyness, suspicion, and anger came all together and confused him? He had nothing ready to say.

“Why,” she went on, “see Mr. Severne, how

he goes on—always cheerful and good-humoured. It is delightful to see him.”

“I am sick of it!” he burst out, impatiently. “Sick of that name, weary—tired of hearing it quoted;” and without a word more he left the room.

She looked after him, smiling. “So far good,” she said to herself. “Poor soul! I could almost pity him.”

All that day Mrs. Lepell sat at home. At times Dr. Cameron came down restlessly to seek for something, but as *she* thought, to watch her. He went away later, but returned to dinner and sat with his patient. At nine o’clock he found she was still at home: at ten he came down to go away.

“Well, Doctor Cameron,” she said, “what about this appointment? Come, you did me a little injustice. Such a *strange* outburst to-day. Why, if anybody was listening, they would say it was—it was——Come, admit you were a little hasty.” And she put out her hand: he took it.

“I admit,” he said, slowly, “that I am the most

weak, foolish, helpless creature that walks this earth. I could have scourged myself to-day after I left you. You must have indulgence for me. I have not been well myself ;” and with this justification, the Doctor hurried away as if he feared to remain a moment longer. Again Mrs. Lepell, resting her cheek upon her hand, smiled to herself.

On the next day a note was brought to her from Severne. On that day the Doctor did not come at all. About four Lord John dropped in, in a *very* bad humour, inclined to pick a quarrel, and very ill-natured. “No levée going on ?” he said. “No men here?—wonderful! Where’s the restored insolvent—the chivalrous, bright-eyed Severne? Capital game, capital game—if it succeeds.”

“I never understand you, Lord John,” she said, calmly.

“O no, of course ; innocent—all innocence ; in a spotless robe of virgin-white. Of course. Halloo ! what’s this ! Tickets ! Box No. 10. Royal Duchess Theatre. Mr. Severne and party.

This very night. Very good—very good. A nice arrangement.”

“I was thinking,” she said, innocently, “would you care to go? No; I suppose you have your charming widow, Lord John. Everybody is talking of *that* conquest.”

“Everybody talking,” repeated he, maliciously. “Of course, you go to the clubs, don’t you? You are out three balls of a night, aren’t you? At all the best houses, too. My dear, don’t talk in that absurd way to *me*. You only expose yourself. Everybody talking!—ha, ha! How good! Well, what about my widow, as you call her. Let me know?”

She was a little scared. There was so much vindictiveness in his tone. He was a vicious old lord, his enemies said.

“So you are off junketting to-night?” he went on. “I bet you he knows nothing of it. Come, no imploring looks. You know he doesn’t. What if a letter comes to-night to him by the penny post when you are gone, my lady? What would you say to that now—for a joke, you know?”

She *did* look frightened at that note—for a joke.

"I knew it," he went on, pleased. "I tell you, you'll get yourself into a scrape. So you have really picked up with that donkey—that prime ass, Severne; that every man could turn round his fingers; that was goose enough to let a few tradesmen—I am ashamed of you, Mrs. Lepell. I am, from my soul. I thought you were a woman on a higher line altogether—that had wit, and saw into things."

"I am sorry to have lost your good opinion," she said, humbly; "which, however, was too flattering altogether. Mr. Severne was very kind and friendly to me: he wished to please me, and he succeeded. He has always held fast by me and never changed; while you, Lord John—you—have deserted your old friend for the charms of a rich widow. Ah! *you* have no right to bring me to an account."

"O, pish! fiddledee!" said Lord John. "This is all got up. You know what that means," added he, really defending himself. "We must

look to the main chance. Between ourselves, I am rather *criblé*; and though I know how to deal with the curs, still I don't want to be worried *now*."

As he rambled on he grew less displeased, and gradually worked himself into a more complacent humour. These "transparent" devices, which we say, "Pish!" to, and "Come now, that's *rather*," if they have at all even a pinchbeck air of truth, gradually come to be accepted. The common hackneyed forms of "humbug" often have a power of their own—it may be because they are thought too "transparent."

Then Lord John became more confidential. "So you'd persuade me, you don't quite like it. But if you knew—— It's too good a thing to be let go. A rich lump of ore made among the spindles; but what's that to me? A fine thumper herself. You saw her that night. But what's that to me? Do you think there's love in the business, my little Arcadian? *Not* a bit! She'd give one of her fat ears to be Lady John. And I'd give—just the trouble of going to church, and just a little

duty, and no more, to have her ten thousands. There's the way we do it, my little green eyes. So you are going to the Duchess's to see that Frenchman, eh? Taken to twisting that poor, soft, spooney round your finger? Ugh! there's my old complaint coming on fast."

Sherry presently found its way in, and his lordship went in a much pleasanter humour than he had entered. Still he said, as he went downstairs, "D—d knowing, artful jade! She's as like"—a lady whom he had known in a neighbouring country, and whose name is of no importance—"as one of their infernal dames here is to another."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE DUCHESS' THEATRE.

THAT night, about seven, she went up to her room to dress. She was carrying out Sir Duncan Dennison's kind prescription: she came down charming. Lord John would have told her in comic raptures—peculiarly his own privilege—that she was “*charmante!*—*ravisante!*—*ebloissante!*” She did not deserve such high-flown epithets, but there was a certain piquancy about her. She had arranged everything very happily in reference to the leaguers in the house, who were bound to watch and harass her.

Doctor Cameron was not coming until the morning; and she had said calmly to her daughter, as we may call her, “I am going out to-night to the theatre with a party, for a little amusement.”

"You are!" said Helen, colouring. (Poor child, she was not ready of speech—never knew what to say at the right moment; so this friendly flush came rushing in and helped materially.)

"Yes, I am," said the other. "I *am* going to be guilty of that heinous offence! I have not been at the theatre for years. I have been told to give myself a little amusement. It will, of course, travel to your father; and he will be only excited, in defiance of the doctor's orders. This is not my concern: a *really* affectionate daughter will know what to do."

A carriage was at the door: a flash of white from opera cloaks could be seen in the window. Mrs. Lepell was "called for." She went down and "floated" out, as it seemed to two pinched "shirt-making" girls who stood to watch. These are cheap glimpses for the squalid. To such the short glimpse of light and beauty (they cannot know these beings as their own mortal sisters!) must be a glimpse of Paradise.

Severne—truly delicate, and even chivalrous—had "done the thing" correctly. Mrs. Fox

Bouchier and her husband were the party. Miss Fox Bouchier also. Are there kindly generous ladies enough always ready to consult a wish of a youth like Severne? There was a "reserve" of a dozen—ay, and more—whom he could have called on for that duty. "Take a friend of yours, Mr. Severne! We shall be charmed. Mr. Fox can go in a cab. What time shall we call." More marvellous still, these ladies had seen the charming French actor; but friendship can make many such sacrifices. There are youths who have the art of casting this spell. The friendly *accolade* they gave her was wonderful. They knew her little story. There was no restraint as they drove to the playhouse. Severne, with "delightful tact," smoothed everything away. He was pleased, too, at the way his *protégée* had behaved.

Lord John Raby—who liked the theatre, and would like it to his grave, as long as his bleared eyes could see—as long as there was a powerful glass that could help old and misty eyes (that he might be deaf he did not so much care)—had found his

way there. He knew the French actor, and swore often that "he was worth the whole tribe of beasts and boors then on the English boards;" and the French actor was glad to meet one who knew the inner French gay life so well. Lord John was free of the stage, too, which he liked very well. "Ah, *mon enfant!*" he said very often, "there you break down. What are you, after all, without decent women to support you? What are these creatures?—take the best of 'em, they walk and talk like cooks. Do you remember the girl you played with in the "*Petite Coquine?*" What a spice she had!—what life!—what grace—what devilish grace!—She had the *diable au corps*, that child; and yet as ignorant as a monkey! But then where's the English! Even with your broken English, my dear friend, she'd turn all our heads here; and, what *you'd* care more for, bring the *francs* in." For even with his dear friends our amiable lord could not but have his jest and compliment.

On this night he was in "waiting," as he said himself—attending the stout widow. He

had, what he called, "taken a box," that is to say, worried the French actor for one; though at this season, and with a successful "run," such favours were a present of so much money. "D—n 'em!" said Lord John to himself. "Deuced glad they ought to be to have decent people here at all." He made a great flourish of this present to his widow; who, wealthy as she was, was infinitely pleased at a saving of the kind. They went in state, having given the slip "to the relations," who were not at all desirous of the alliance—a brother and sister especially. Lord John chuckled over all this; but as soon as they were established in their box, and he had begun to range the house with his strong glasses, he detected the party in No. 10. His eyes, as we have said, were not very strong. The glare of gaslight during many years and many orgies had affected them, and in some haste he began to clean the glasses carefully. He looked again. It was quite true; and the widow heard him muttering—*grommélant*—noisily, behind—

"More of her tricks—d—n—! What is she at?"

I can see. On the sly, I suppose ; and that soft donkey too !" The widow looked round ; and, accustomed to these private bursts of discontent, spoke to him without guessing the reason. He hardly answered her. At the second act he had gone round to see Legai. "These fellows expect it, you know." He stood moodily at the back, growling and sneering half-audibly, and all but quarrelsome to the man whose domain he had invaded. Severne, much annoyed, and hoping he would retire every moment, bore it with an enforced good humour. When Mrs. Lepell grew naturally enthusiastic, as the dramatic interest deepened, his lordship openly scoffed, though addressing no one. "How like nature and artlessness ; charming, charming ! See how we turn the water butts on ! Keep the water-works going, my lads." Only for an imploring look from his companion, Severne would have risen and certainly put a stop to her interrupter. The play had begun. It was a full house, for the French actor was in fashion ; not that he needed such patronage. In his own land he

was the most elegant and fascinating of stage lovers—the most irresistible “Young First.” Who had not seen at one of the great theatres the touching play of “Valentine,” in which Legai—that was his name—had brought tears and sobs from a hundred eyes! The play was pronounced by some “unpleasant;” by others not so lenient, “vicious;” yet still the tenderness, grace, and power of the young lover carried all through. He became associated with that character. It was a great day when he came to England—to bring with him that wonderful refinement, that look and air of delicacy, which French players contrive to assume. For on our English stage the terrible air of stageyness; the coarseness of paint and patches; the rudest journeyman-work of daubing and powdering and general earthiness—a sense of “make-up,” is always present. On the French boards descends an air of spirituality. The men and women are seen as through a film or cloud. They are glorified, as it were: their voices have a touching and melodious chant.

This was a great play, which had had a great "run" in his own country as *La Carrière d'un Voleur*, and which English hands had turned into a good English melodrama. Yet even with this rude "adzing" and hewing, the marvellous outlines of French dramatic marquetry, their elegant "joinery" of the stage, could not be overlaid. Their delicate fingers can do nothing ill; and as in their own cookery, can actually make a dish—where there is neither plot nor meat—by mere skilful dressing. What art! What truth! Not that mere broad aim of leading the interest up to the end of an act, which is merely elementary, but a whole series of such "leadings up,"—judicious suspensions and hopes deferred—an artful playing on the feelings even in slight points, so as to fill in the time while the grander business is slowly going forward. In acting, too, our French player had brought his graces with him. He had tried, also, to train his companions into something of the graceful bearing, and of the soft and tender elocution which he had left behind him. But he soon found that that was hopeless.

Meanwhile, "The Robber's Course" was having a successful run, and in box No. 10, was sitting an absorbed party, following it with intense interest..

The robber was at one time rich, at another time poor; and he had a charming daughter, who had been taken from him when she was a child, by some "good ladies," and brought up away from such unprofitable, though paternal, society. Later on, when she was grown up, he was about to rob a château, with his companions. It was the third act. The night had come; the darkness was abroad. It was one of the famous "set scenes"—a terrace on the side of the château, with steps down into the gardens, and a steep stair from the plain below. The drawing room had glass-doors, opened on the terrace; that room was lit up, waiting for the countess, who was away at a neighbouring ball. The flowers on her table could be seen; the piano, the greenhouse. It was on account of this absence that the night had been chosen—and such pretty music was now playing—as the dark figures were seen gathering below.

Who cannot guess what is to come? Mr. Fox Bouchier did, and began to say aloud—"Of course, he is going to rob the place, and will find that it is his own daughter!" when Mrs. Lepell, whose glowing face was bent forward into the darkened theatre, looked round reproachfully. Severne, interested himself, was indignant. He was not ashamed to be absorbed in a stage-play, and boasted that he had not outlived such emotions. "Let us hear, please," he said, coldly. "You see every one else is listening." The "coarseness" of the husband was, as the wife said later, properly rebuked. Mr. Severne's views on this point, or indeed on any other, were indeed cordially supported. But between him and Mrs. Lepell this agreement of enjoyment was a fresh bond. Now they followed breathlessly the trailing string of robbers ascending the steps cautiously. The contrast between the tranquil and refined boudoir and these unlawful marauders added to the effect. The slow music rose and fell. Suddenly there was a cracking of whips and the sound of wheels. They were all on the terrace, pausing to know

what to do; but here was the Countess come home!

The dark figures seemed in confusion; but what difference did that make. The Count, himself, was away. A maid—a few servants—these could make little difference. Then she could be seen through the windows, in her flowers and opera cloak. She sits down—she rises, opens the window, and looks out. The others crouch close to the wall, in the shadow. She sits down again, and begins to write. The truth is, she is waiting for somebody. There was an elegant Victor at the ball—a Count, but not her husband. There is a whispering going on outside—they are impatient. After all it is only a woman—she is alone. The arch robber gruffly plans the attack, and will lead. The window is opened softly; a cry—a cry from him as well as from her. In that moment he had recognised his daughter. It was too late. The others could not understand—he could not check them nor defend her. But she was out on the terrace in her opera cloak and flowers, screaming for aid. Now the

alarm bell sounds, and there is a cry from below—there is confusion. In the midst of which there is a shot, and the unhappy Countess falls.

Severne and Mrs. Lepell, both in front, drew back with a sigh of relief as the drop-scene came down.

“Charming piece!” said he; “and how naturally done—no vulgar rant or tearing to tatters—no striding or hurry.”

“Oh,” said she, and there were traces of tears in her eyes—at least there was the redness or irritation of tears—“it is *too* exciting.”

At that moment the box-keeper opened the door, and stooped forward to whisper Severne.

“Good gracious!” said the latter, “what folly!”

* * * * *

CHAPTER IX.

A RESOLVE.

MR. LEPELL had been sitting up in his room. He was in lower spirits and more excited than usual.

"Why is not Cameron here to-night?" he said, irritably. "I suppose he is beginning to desert me, too. Why isn't he here?" Then he made his daughter read to him; but he listened fretfully and impatiently. To the sick, and to those weary with sickness, the finest speculations seem poor, trifling, and childish. He soon got tired. His mind was wandering away. "I am in great pain," he said, "my eyes seem starting out of my head."

"That is because you have not slept, dearest. But the doctor has sent us his remedy, and you must take it to-night, dearest."

"Ah! it will soon all end, dear," he said, sadly; "and only for you, I would say the sooner if possible. And yet all my own fault—all! I blame no one. Even she—she, I daresay, cannot help it. It was I forced it upon her in my own ridiculous fit of folly. Now I expect her to care for *me*. And yet—oh! my dearest child, forgive this weakness and folly—I did like her, and do like her still, I do. Call it what folly you like. But I know she despises me, and laughs at me—laughs with others at me."

Alarmed, she tried to soothe him in this new fit, which had never been on him before. "She could make me well—she knows she could!" he went on; "but she prefers to drive me to madness. That is her spirit. She has combined with that man—that Severne. He has been my ruin from the beginning. It was near his house that all this misery began. She likes him. I feel she does. I daresay they are making their plots together after I am gone out of the way." He stopped a moment for breath. "O! what ingratitude—if she was only kind and affectionate

it would soothe these sufferings. Fool that I am, I could forgive. Dear child ! do you feel a contempt for your father—your foolish, weak, miserable father—as I tell you this ? But I can guess what her plan is. Why does she stay away from me ?—why does she throw it all on you ? Down, I suppose, at this moment writing her letters—writing her letters—writing her letters—eh ?”

The young girl cast down her eyes. This new fit distressed her. She knew not how to deal with it. In a moment he had grown restless, and bade her leave. She went to her room. In a few minutes more a strange idea seized him, and he rose up and feebly tottered down to the drawing-room. It was deserted—there was no light there. The fire even had gone out. He went up again and rang for Patty. Where was her mistress ? Patty, good and well meaning, had no feeling for mere sentiment, and told the truth, that her mistress had gone out, dressed, to the theatre. He said nothing, and she went down. But his eyes were long fixed in one

wild stare on one spot in the room. Then he rose and tottered over to his press, where were his dress-clothes,—now long disused.

CHAPTER X.

A SCENE.

DOWN in the balcony of the theatre, people—even at the most exciting crisis of the piece—were turning round to look at the grey-haired, wild-eyed, and almost ghastly gentleman who had just come in, as it were out of his bed. He had hardly strength to keep himself upright, and he was not watching the play nor the acting; but his strained eyes were fixed on a particular box. An elderly gentleman, after a consultation with his daughter, had even said to him diffidently, “*I think, sir, you had better go home, you are not well, I can see.*” But he made no answer beyond a slow turning of his eyes on the suggester, and he turned them back again speedily. They heard him even talking passionately to himself, and saw him clutching the box-rail. When the scene

on the terrace was going on they forgot him, when it was down they found that he had gone.

Poor, hunted, harried soul! Was it wonderful that he fell into such extravagance? Who shall say that the scene that was now to follow was not of the most painful and distressing sort?

When the box-door was opened, Severne and Mrs. Lepell, and the lady and gentleman and daughter, all looked back, and saw this gaunt, worn, and white face, looking down on them like that of some corpse out of a grave.

Lord John described the whole thing at his club—*coram publico*—to many audiences. "It beat the "Ambigu," my friend. If a knowing French fellow had been there, he'd have booked it hot and hot for the Fifth Act. It beat anything I ever saw. The wife down in front, with the *servente*, and the husband, looking, I vow to heaven, as cracked as any dozen hatters you'd collect, and shaking in a fever, out of the bed-clothes, you know, standing and clutching at the door! I knew what was coming, you know. I never, never saw such a situation. 'Go,' I said

to him. 'For God's sake get home, do.' But he never heard. I thought his eyes would have just burst out of his head. Says he, 'I have discovered it. It was a nice plot, but it was revealed.' He didn't say who the deuce did so!"

It was indeed a miserable scene. People in the next box heard, through the partition, and looked on to see the ravings of the unhappy man.

"Come away," he said, "or I'll have you dragged away. I am not the poor sick fool you take me for. I have discovered your conspiracy at last. I am too long dying, am I? Not yet, not yet—for while I live I can watch—even if I die in the matter!"

"Shocking, shocking!" Mr. Bouchier called it.

Severne hastily rose, and went to him, trying to soothe. "For Heaven's sake, take care. Do not, I implore of you. Think of all these people here—this public place. See, every one is looking! You do not want to disgrace your——"

"I do—I do!" said he, in the same wild way. "Why did she disgrace me? And *you*. What

are you? How dare you presume? Oh! what is this?" He put his hands to his head.

They never saw the last act of the "Voleur," admitted to be Legai's masterpiece.

A few box-keepers and loungers saw the wild, mad-looking gentleman, helped downstairs. The people in the next box wondered, and told over their afternoon tea the strange little play that had been going on in the next box. "We couldn't make it out, exactly, dear," said Julia; "but it seemed dreadful. Some lady, whose husband was sick, had gone out without his leave, and he pursued them to the box, though he was dying at the time. We heard them quite plain. The young man was very nice looking. Awful, isn't it? Have some more bread and butter, dear."

Awful, indeed. The unhappy Mr. Lepell was got home, the family being "bundled away" rather unceremoniously, causing Severne to be pronounced a "low, ill-bred fellow."

"Get home, out of the way—don't stop chattering here," was his farewell speech. He was highly

excited. "This is outrageous!" he said to the poor wife; "dreadful for you! No sickness can excuse it—I can make no allowance for it. A more cruel outrage was never perpetrated. Don't mind it," he went on, "I don't, I assure you. It has only proved to me yet more your sweetness of temper, and almost miraculous patience. He must be radically bad. That mean, skulking doctor has put him up to it, I know."

In a moment the person alluded to came downstairs. "I can do nothing in this case. He is beyond my strength. I am sending for Sir Duncan Dennison. A nice night's work it was. Those who took part in it may well be proud."

"Indeed they *may*," repeated Severne, striding up to him. "I tell you, to your face, this is your doing. It is a noble action."

DOCTOR CAMERON (quite calmly): "What action of mine do you praise so ironically?"

SEVERNE (still more excited): "Your *religion* has taught you surprising command of features. You did not let that unfortunate man

above, who is not accountable, know of this expedition? All to gratify your own rage and petty malice."

DOCTOR CAMERON (turning to Mrs. Lepell): "Is this your view also? Do you believe that I have done this?"

MRS. LEPELL (not in the least embarrassed, but after a moment's hesitation speaking out boldly): "Since you appeal to me, I must say I do not. I know enough of my unfortunate husband to be sure that this is another outburst of his malady."

DOCTOR CAMERON: "Thank you for that testimony. Here is the servant. You compel me to this degrading appeal. What time was it when you opened the door for me to-night? Had he gone out?"

PATTY: "It was about ten o'clock, and I had just come running down from master's room, in a mortal fright, to find he wasn't there."

DOCTOR CAMERON (not at all exulting): "You see you have done me an injustice. Ah, there is Sir Duncan."

Severne was a little taken back, and remained silent. Sir Duncan came posting upstairs three steps at a time. He was taken up to the sick man. They all followed.

“Ah! the old story,” he said. “I warned you against all this. I don’t know what we can do for him. A little more of this, and the man is mad.” Mr. Lepell’s case was indeed piteous. His eyes were fixed. He was breathing hard, and with difficulty; and he seemed unconscious of all about him. “We must clear the room. It is too close having all these people. Just leave me with him. You may stay, my dear.” This was said to Helen, who had been standing there in a miserable stupor, almost as overwhelmed as her father. He was soon brought round. “No sleep last night?” said the doctor. “Well, he shall sleep to-night. I have brought my Italian doctor’s remedy—a wonderful thing. There are six draughts; and now I think the best thing is to make *you* the guardian. Keep them fast locked up in your little desk. Give him one, but only *one*,—he will be wanting more, and

one perhaps every night. But take care; they are not to be played tricks with. Two of these would be murder. So now, can I rely upon you? And see, you needn't say anything about them—that will be the best and safest way.” She took the six little bottles a little timorously. “All right,” he said, “we will give him one now, and you shall see.” He held up the head of the sick man and poured it down his throat. “In half an hour he will awake, and then fall into such a sleep.”

It fell out precisely as he said. After he had gone, Severne came up to Doctor Cameron and said: “I owe you some apology,” he said, “for I did you a wrong. I am sorry for it. I was hasty; but the flurry of all this business has upset me.”

DOCTOR CAMERON: “I did not want this—I did not expect or require it, I assure you. If you will have more allowance another time, I shall feel that the handsomest *amende* you can make.” With a bow he went away.

Severne said to Mrs. Lepell, when they were

alone, "I believe he is not so bad after all—perhaps we have been hasty."

"And how generous of you!" said she, with enthusiasm; "another's pride would have been in the way. "It was indeed noble."

"Not at all," he said; "and besides, I didn't know. I feel an instinct about the man. This was a blunder, I admit. But still, no matter. What a night it has been altogether. And the worst is, I see nothing shining for the future. I am thinking of *you*."

"Never mind that. You *must* not think of me at all. My lot is to suffer—suffer to the end—all the days of my life. No release that I can see."

"But you shall not: that I am fixed upon. It is monstrous—getting too unreasonable altogether. I can see what this is causing. There is method in all this fury and madness. You are not to be the victim—no code of duties can intend you to be such. Really," added he, working himself into an eloquent fury, "such an *exposé*, such a brutal attack on an unoffending woman, there is

something malignant in it! And now, my dear Mrs. Lepell, you must leave the matter to your friends, who will take care that you are not trampled on. You need have no fears about his health. A man that could do what he has done to-night, can't be very ill. I am afraid a morbid malignancy is more the malady that he suffers from."

"No, no!" protested she.

"Yes, yes, though. I know the world, and men and women. This will be happening over and over again until you are worried into your grave—if you only give in to these humours. So now I have determined you shall just go on and take your amusement as the doctor ordered you. You shall dine with us on the day after to-morrow; and Dennison's dinner?—you shall go to that, too. I insist. And as a sort of *amende* I shall ask our dry friend."

That potion of Sir Duncan's had a wonderful effect. It threw the patient into a profound and heavy slumber. The wildness seemed to pass away from his eyes—had gone altogether.

The Doctor remained on duty till long past

midnight. He was going downstairs softly, when a gentle voice called to him from the drawing-room.

"Come in here, Doctor Cameron, for a moment," she said. She was still in her theatre dress, without her opera-cloak—flowers in her hair; and what with the softened light, and a half-pensive, half-sad look; seemed to the grim Doctor almost too beautiful to last for a moment. She went on: "I wanted to tell you—I was waiting up—how I admired the way you bore that charge—how noble it was! What calm patience!"

"It is very good of you to say so," he said, colouring. "Praise from you is unusual."

"And I wanted to tell you also, I did not believe that you had done what was said. No, indeed; with all our battles and hostility, I never, never, have thought you could do anything but what is loyal and open."

Again he coloured. "Why do you say this to me—what is the meaning of it?"

"What *object* have I in view, I suppose you mean?" she said, a little sadly. "Nothing, I assure you. It is said now, and that is all."

"I don't mean that, indeed," he said, eagerly :
"only it is so unusual. I don't deserve your praise.
Still it is good of you, and I thank you for it."

"How stiff and cold you are," she said, warmly.
"Why do you not speak to me freely. I would
give worlds to know your real opinion. I know
what you thought of me to-night—the worst
opinion—vain, heartless, unfeeling, frivolous.
And yet—only I know it is no use saying any-
thing about myself that *you* will accept—and yet
I did it on principle. I did indeed—as I stand
here!—to show that I am no slave and have a
little independence."

And she did stand there with her eyes looking
up devoutly at the chandelier, and seemed to the
Doctor like a suffering saint.

"Perhaps so," he said, "most certainly so.
But," he added shortly, "for whom was this show
of independence?"

She looked down and hesitated. "Why should
I not tell you? It was for *you*. There are a
hundred things I do which I do not mean. For
foolish love of acting I pretend to be brave—I am

a miserable coward ; and pretend to be flippant, smart, and insolent—but all this is to cover my weakness. You must make allowance, Doctor Cameron. I am not the same now as I was even yesterday. These scenes are unnerving me. I am not guilty, indeed I mean well. But if you had seen what had taken place to-night—the disgrace, the *cruel* disgrace, the publicity!—you would have felt for me, indeed you would—branded, *degraded* as I was before a crowd, and by my *own* husband. I could have wished to die at that moment. What had I done? Gone to a theatre—what I had been ordered to do by my own doctor. Oh! I am very unfortunate, very miserable, and without a friend to consult with or advise me.”

He saw her weeping, and he remained silent for a moment. “Have you not Mr. Severne—your friend and adviser—who likes you, and for whom it would appear you naturally have a great partiality?”

“I?”

“Yes! You are in a pleasant confederacy together, and consult and take measures against

the grim, stiff doctor, who is the common enemy. Ah, you cannot deny that," he went on, with a sort of mournful reproach. "And yet it has not begun with me. No, indeed. What have I done more than my duty, to earn such enmity?"

"Because you disliked me, and so you know you do, and despise me. You have the worst opinion. *That is what has driven us to these conspiracies*, as you call them. Nothing I can do or say would make you think well of me. That I felt from the beginning."

"No, no," he said, warmly, "it is a duty to dispel that delusion. I admire your gifts and cleverness—your brilliancy, and always *did*."

"You! No!"

"Yes, though you talk of confederacies. I am cold and stiff and ungenial. I know I have nothing to recommend me. I have no powers of sneering and jesting as some men have. I do not envy them such. But still, had you wished it, we might have been friends, and I might have been a stronger and more powerful friend than another. But no matter now."

"But it is matter now. Why not still be my friend—stand by me—guide me. I want it sadly. Surely you cannot think for a moment that between two minds, his and yours, there can be a choice. He is very good and kind, and has done a great deal for me. I believe he likes me. I believe if I was free to-morrow——"

She hesitated.

"What?" he said. "So indeed I might have guessed."

"He would leave rank and station; but that is not what I crave. I must have something that I could admire—look up to—lean on. Something noble and grand. But I know what my duty is—that is a vain thought that I would not even breathe to any one else, and that duty I am prepared to go through with down to my grave."

At this juncture the young watcher upstairs, delighted at the change in her father's state, and having been convinced that it was a lasting one, came down eagerly. She wanted something that had been left in the drawing-room. The door

was half-open, and she shrank back as she heard the voice. That voice had always for her a repelling effect. She stopped, not indeed to listen, but to decide whether she should go in or turn back. She *was* turning back when she heard Doctor Cameron, in a low, trembling voice, say :

“Do you mean all this, and do you wish me to be your friend? No—no! you are dangerous and insidious. You are bound to his interest.”

“You will not trust me. I see you will not aid me. You would sooner see me suffer, cruelly waste away in this bondage until I die. And yet if I had *the sympathy of a great intellect*—No, you dislike me, and are bound to punish me.”

“No, no ; a thousand times no. How am I to convince you ?” he went on, hurriedly. “Let me give you some proof. I am rough, I know, and cold, but I mean——”

“Are you serious ?” she said. “This is too blessed news ! Then you esteem me, and have some respect for me ? Then you will show it to me by some act, some little act of kindness. I may look forward,” she added, timorously, “at

least to this. Oh! I shall sleep very happily to-night for this."

He had sat looking at her a little fixedly. Suddenly he stood up, and burst out with:

"Go back! stand away! Let me out of this house!—wretched, weak, miserable being that I am! that have struggled for so many years, and now find myself deserted! Heaven send me strength, and leave me not in this trial. Oh! stand away! Do not speak to me, I implore you! Let me go on in my old course!"

Awe-struck, and not daring to breathe, the young girl listened with beating heart to this frantic burst. She had not strength to go away. She heard his heavy steps as he tramped to the door. It was dark on the stairs, so he tramped by her without seeing her. Then she heard Mrs. Lepell say aloud:

"Poor Doctor, I knew it was coming to this!"

Helen fled to her room. In a moment she had flung herself on her knees, with her face pressed against her bed, and was weeping. "Ah, who is to help us now! Poor papa! poor papa! They

are all joined against us now. They will destroy us. There is not one friend left—not a single friend! What is to become of poor papa?”

Neither of these ladies got to sleep until morning broke. Mrs. Lepell was absolutely nervous from excitement. She was infinitely pleased—not so much with the matter itself and its possible fruits—but with the evidence of her own powers. “Such a power as that,” she said to herself softly, as her head lay on her pillow, “why, there are no bounds to what it may effect. *We may be Prime Ministers yet.*”

And, absorbed in that pleasing speculation, she went off presently to sleep. Who was the “Prime Minister” of this dream? Scarcely the sick man sleeping an enforced sleep above—scarcely the foolish Doctor, not yet asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

WEAKNESS.

BUT the condition of the unhappy man's daughter was indeed piteous. She came down in the morning worn, scared, and aged. Her father seemed to be better; but there was a dull heaviness about him.

"Was that all a dream last night?" he asked, wearily. "I suppose so. What is the matter—are you getting ill, dearest? Has any bad news come in? Tell it to me. I am the proper object to whom all bad news should come. It will make little difference, and the sooner it comes the better. Where is that dear doctor? what time is he to be here?"

She could hardly answer him. The sense of their utter desertion, and the unseen difficulties that seemed closing about her, were forcing the tears

to her eyes. What could she do? And yet, if she did not speak, it seemed sure destruction for the father she so loved. It was like stopping a nervous being with a heart complaint, who was walking over a precipice, whom even the shock of such a restraint might kill.

“Oh, papa!” she said, in a faltering voice, “we trust him too much—I fear we do, at least. I begin to think he is against us. Oh, we cannot be too careful, for we have so few friends!”

The wild eyes wandered over her soft face a moment. Then he answered: “My darling, don’t—don’t let them persuade or turn you against your poor broken, wretched father. After that, darling, the best thing for me would be to die at once. No, no; Cameron is my friend, and yours too, the only one who has will and strength to stand by us.”

What could she say?—what could she do? How could she wring that fond but loving foolish heart with cruel logic? What was her conclusion—to work her own little brain and rest on

her own poor strength, such as it was? But Heaven, she knew, [had often aided the weak—even those weaker than she was. Could she find no one?—and she cast about desperately, round the narrow circle of those whom she knew. She still was making her visits of charity to the Palmers, and her friend was mending slowly. Suddenly she recalled an honest trusting face, of blunt speech, good faithful eyes, and a hand that gave a warm grasp—Selby's, in short. He knew her, she knew him, sufficiently. She would write to him—go to him—and without delay; for there was a dreadful presentiment on her that all these “enemies,” as she considered them, who were gathering about her father's bed, would proceed to the worst extremities. A wild but pardonable delusion in one so affectionate as she was.

It was on this day that Doctor Pemberton came, having returned from his country expedition. He was in good humour. The country patient had been saved—saved from local assailants by a prompt reversal of their system.

And he had received what he called "a good fat whopping fee" for his services.

"Well, my poor little girl," he said, "how are we getting on upstairs? Ah, I left you a good substitute—slow, steady, brilliant, and sure and straight as an arrow."

(Mrs. Lepell was in bed, not having yet risen. She was very weary with her long nights' vigils.)

"Why, you look cast down, my child, and cut up. He's going on well? Cameron wrote me so. No bad news, my poor little soul," he added compassionately, taking her hand. "What's this about?"

She could hardly speak—she was weeping. "O, Doctor Pemberton! What is to become of us? We are all very miserable."

"Nonsense. Sit down there on the sofa, next the old doctor, and tell him everything."

Here was the friend sent specially, and made for confidence. The little girl, heartily affected by his affectionate manner, looked up into his face and told her story. What she feared—how little she hoped—the hostility that was gathering

about them—the awful sense of depression and conviction that in that house horrors were to gather. When she spoke of Cameron, he started and “pooh-poohed” it.

“My dear little girl, nightmare, nightmare! That pretty head of yours is all agog. He’s a rock—might as well stir the Monument. I know very well the whole thing, and what it comes to. You don’t know that man. He has no feeling, no blood, no pulse. I believe I know as well as if I saw him he was ‘playing’ your good mamma. He’s very ‘deep, that man. But just leave him to his game, whatever it is, and let him work it out. I am sorry to tell you we can only leave him a week or so, as they have got a fine place for him out at Demerara. I must tell him about that when he comes—deuced sorry to lose him, too. No, no. That young fellow and your mamma—I don’t like *his* going—but don’t take on in this absurd way. Empty your little head of all these fears and terrors, and leave it to me. Now for papa.”

He went up and saw him. He was a little

startled at the change ; but he talked cheerily to the patient.

"I am very glad to see you," said the other, "and very glad you have come back."

"To be sure, my poor friend. And Cameron, how do you like him? Tell me what he has done for you."

"What he could indeed," said Lepell. "But it will do me little good. By the way, tell *her*, my little Helen, all that. She has taken some dislike to him—girls are so strange. Show her—you understand."

"Ah, exactly. Leave it to me; just what I thought. So you've had another doctor—the grand swell of all? What did he do for you?"

"O, such a relief. Last night was the only night I have closed my eyes. Such a sweet heavy sleep!"

"You must take care," said the doctor, gravely. "That's a remedy there must be no playing tricks with. I hope you keep to the very letter of what Dennison said."

When the doctor came down and was going

away, Doctor Cameron arrived, and came upstairs hastily into the drawing-room. Helen, not at all convinced, had gone out in trouble on some expedition. There was a strange bearing in Doctor Cameron, a warmth and eagerness in his face that positively made Pinkerton start. And, above all, there was the strangest symptom of a change: *he had a little flower in his button-hole!*

"Where have you been?—where do you come from?" said Doctor Pinkerton, looking doubtfully at him from head to foot.

The other coloured, and grew a little confused. "I have just come from home," he said stiffly. "I did not expect you back for a long time."

The doctor muttered something to himself. What was passing through his head was, "There is something in what the little girl said."

"You must have bought that flower, my friend," he said, sarcastically. "I never knew you kept such gracious things at home. No matter; listen to this. I was just going to write to you. Another opening for you, my friend. They want you out at Demerara. Noble ship

going, and a fine berth—I mean in the colony. I tell you what,” added the doctor, “*I recommend you to accept it, and go at once.*”

“Go at once?” the other said, starting. “Why, when does she sail?”

“In about ten days, perhaps sooner. Take my advice, and lose no time. So fine a thing will not occur again.”

The other looked down on the ground. “I can hardly get prepared so soon,” he said, hesitating.

“In the last ship,” said the doctor, “you went at a day’s notice.”

“Besides, here I am beginning to get something to do, and really, the climate——”

“Something to do,” repeated the doctor. “Why, you told me this was what you were pining for—that the climate suited you. Besides, I have reason to know,” added the doctor, mysteriously, “*there are a crowd of poor emigrants going—I took care to make that out for you.*”

“A charming inducement,” said the other, half-sarcastically.

"So you would have said, in earnest, before I went away," answered the doctor, gravely. "You would have called it a harvest for the Lord."

"Dear Doctor Pinkerton," said the other, looking down, "I don't mean what I say. I am ashamed to speak so. But it is sudden—a little sudden, and, if you will let me, I shall think it over and give you an answer."

Doctor Pinkerton went away in a reflective state. "I declare the little girl sees further than I do, with all my sense."

But when he had driven away, the other remained walking up and down on the rug, his face almost contorted with grief and agitation.

"Miserable humiliation, and all my *own* doing. O that I should have sunk so low!" And as his eyes sank towards the ground they fell on the flower in his coat, and with a passionate gesture *he tore it out* and flung it into the fire-place. He looked at it with some satisfaction, as if this was a victory.

Now he heard a gentle voice behind him, and there enters the lady of the house—humble, cast

down, yet refreshed by her long rest: she is in presence of her master. He noticed a great change in her, a kind of lowly, timorous bearing, and a shrinking from his eye. At that vision the sense of degradation and shame, and alas! the wish for noble self-emancipation, all passed away. His eyes were fixed with a kind of passive regret on the rejected flower.

She softly and with the same air of submission said, "Mr. Severne has written about Sir Duncan's little dinner he wishes to give, and he enclosed an invitation for you."

"For me?" he said, starting. "Surely not."

"Yes," she said, "here it is. Indeed it is the least *amende*. He feels it deeply, I know, and only wants to show that he is sorry. Am I," she added, timorously, "*are we* to go or to stay?"

"Do you ask *me*?" he said, half-joyfully. "Would you be guided by me, if I decided?"

"Not yesterday, certainly," she answered; "but since our conversation of last night——"

"And if I say not to go?"

She shook her head sadly. "Well, it can-

not be helped, we must submit. I was wishing to *show* you that I was not so wicked as you believed me, and this would be a good opportunity to prove to you that I *was* reformed."

He was in a tumult of confusion, poor weak soul. He had not even resolution to pray, and said, "Then I decide to go. It will be a little change for you—as the great doctor ordered it also." Then with a fitful transition he became moody. He was a fool, a soft fool. This was a plot, a woman's scheme. "You are very eager to meet this Mr. Severne," he said, suspiciously. "He is a grand match, they say. You met him before?"

"Yes," she said, in the same lowly manner, "long ago. And he has a sort of regard for me. But he is ambitious—he has an ambitious mother—he would be in office. They are planning great matches for him, to form connections. Yes, he likes me; *but if I was a young girl, Doctor Cameron, he would just amuse himself with me, like other young men, and come some fine morning with an easy air to break the news of*

his marriage to me. It is because he knows he is safe with me that he comes so carelessly. What if *I* were amusing myself with him, Doctor Cameron? Good chances of a future peerage—connection—pleasant country house—interest—all these things make a useful friend, Doctor Cameron.”

There was a significance in her eyes as they rested on him. Her words seemed to convey a great deal more. She seemed to glide from his sight like a heavenly ministrant—an angel visitor *going to lunch*. For her little meal was waiting—below. Unhappy Doctor!

He stayed long, as she had left him—irresolute, dream; ythen with a sudden resolution took his hat and left the house. He did not return till late, though Mr. Lepell often asked for him. He spent that day away out in the suburbs, pacing furiously, as if flying from some evil genius that was pursuing him. Alas! before long that familiar had overtaken him and held him in his gripe. It was about nine when he arrived. He had some purpose in his head, and

had formed some distinct resolution, for he walked straight up to Mr. Lepell's room.

The patient, ill and feverish, welcomed him eagerly. "I have been waiting for you all day," he said, pettishly; "others do not attend on me. No one wants me to be well."

The Doctor was looking at him gloomily. "That is," he said, with a hard grim tone, "as it *shall* be, as it is ordained. As with your body, so with your soul. Well for those," he said, standing up and looking down on the other, "who, as they draw near to the edge of their grave, feel a conviction that they are so chosen. Evil, eternal evil, for those who do not."

This tall figure—his fiery eyes, his long arm outstretched—seemed to the clouded senses of the unhappy Mr. Lepell to be elements of a condemning judge. The head shrank away on the pillow.

"No, no, no," he said, frantically, "a thousand times no. I do not let it near me. I never shall. It is a cruel, miserable, chilling doctrine.

Better let me linger here in agonies than let it near me."

"As if I can control these things," said the other, moodily. "Why should I keep the truth from you, as a foolish delicacy has hitherto made me? It is written in your own heart; you *dare* not deny it. *You have a conviction* that what I am saying *is* true. You know it in your heart of hearts, and neither I nor you, nor the holiest living, can answer that terrible question for you, or change the inevitable destiny. We are all of us creatures—wretched, helpless, irresponsible creatures—hurried on by furies, I myself the most miserable and helpless of all. But what can we do? Nothing—nothing: though we pray and pray again. O, it is cruel, dreadful, miserable, and despairing; but that eternal destiny *must* be worked out."

The other listened to this strange harangue, delivered almost frantically, with terror and distending eyes. His breath came and went heavily. He seemed to cower under this terrible denunciation.

"You never said this before," he faltered.
"You would not speak of these things when I asked you and I wished you."

He almost appeared to be appealing against a sentence.

"Can I avail you in the least?" said the other. "What are we all but mere worms, poor helpless sinful men? What can we do for ourselves? What can I do? Take me. You think I am good, and holy, and pious, because I talk. Don't believe it; I am worse than the vilest sinner that crawls through the streets. We know not if there be hope for us, for you, for me, for any one. What right have we to expect mercy, and not judgment, when, *after years of struggle*, everything goes, gives way, and we are left sinners like the rest, no better than the rest? O, it is better it should all end. Better that it should end the sooner, and have done with this sham struggle—this poor fight which is only to bring disgrace and ruin."

He covered his face and turned away. The other, who could see the secret undercurrent

all this frantic speech, turned away with a groan.

"I knew this. It has haunted me through life."

"Better to know it now, then," said the other, bitterly, "and make what you can of it. Take down your old dusty divinity, pore over its stained leaves, and see if you can get comfort out of them. I don't believe it. I don't say it—don't take it from me. I admit that this came to you from yourself—from others," he added, almost imploringly. "What am I, indeed, that I should preach or lay down gospel? If you only knew the creature *I* am."

For half an hour more went on this strange scene. The sick man, excited, with every nerve strung to the utmost, listened, as if he was in some delirium, to the wild denunciation that was poured out; and what to a sound and reasoning man would have seemed mere incoherence—mere unconsecutive rambling, *apropos* of nothing, came to his diseased brain as the inspired utterances of a prophet and preacher. Towards midnight,

when Doctor Cameron had gone, he had called feebly to his daughter, who came to him, thinking, poor child, that one of the "soothing" evenings, rational and calm, had gone over with the best effect.

She was struck with the change. Every fibre in his frame was quivering and quivering again.

"Stay by me! Do not leave me!" he cried. "If I were to die this night! O save me—save me! I knew it. I knew this was coming!" with more to the same effect, which utterly bewildered and scared her. "Another night of agony before me," he went on, despairingly. "I cannot—I dare not be left alone. Stay, get me another of those draughts; that will give me rest. Quick—the very thing."

She could not do it. It would be dangerous—perhaps death. The doctor had said that two were never to be given on two succeeding nights. Utterly overwhelmed by the crisis—unnerved—herself alone in that house, and with these horrors gathering about her, she burst into a passion of tears.

"Ah, you cry," he said, looking at her; "there will be something to weep for soon. Fetch it for me—go."

"I have not got them," she sobbed; "indeed, no, dearest papa. There are none in the house."

Who shall blame her falsehood in such a moment of distraction? Like Uncle's Toby's oath, it must have been blotted out for ever by the compassionate recording angel.

"Just so—just what might be expected. No one cares, no one thinks. Let me be cast out like a dog, and after that—Oh! Oh!" and he sank back with a half-cry.

That was indeed a night of horrors. The unhappy daughter sat up with her more unhappy father, and caught snatches of his ravings about final perdition and eternal torments. At times he got a few minutes' sleep, but only to start up with a cry. She could only sit by him and weep. About eight in the morning he did fall off into a doze, and then she stole out. Later she met her "mamma" on the stairs. That lady, fresh from a bounteous night's rest, was herself

astonished at the worn and shrunken features. But there was a sparkle in those eyes which she had never noticed before.

“Your father, dear?” said the lady, sweetly.

“What sort of a night?”

“Your are killing him,” burst out the young girl, catching at the banister. “You are killing him fast; and you are doing it on purpose. And I warn you, if he dies, it will be murder.”

The lady was scared. “What is over you?”

“I know who will be the murderess, and why it is done. I can see. But I will not suffer it, even if I call in people to protect us. I tell you, if this goes on, I shall go—go—go to the magistrates, or some one in authority. I will—you don’t know me.”

“Magistrates!” Mrs. Lepell could only repeat.

“Yes, yes. I know what is going on, though you think I do not. I see it *all*—all that you are plotting with him. No, you will not stab him, or poison him, but you are murdering him among you all the same.”

“This is madness and folly,” said Mrs. Lepell,

now quite recovered. "You do not know what folly you are talking."

"It *is* folly, I know, to protect my poor father. But you shall *not* destroy him. I shall have him taken away in defiance of you, and at once. He *shall* live. And I have arranged it all."

Mrs. Lepell was a little confounded at this declaration and the new boldness with which it was made. She looked after her without being able to reply. "Take him away, will they," she thought, and smiled to herself. "She has not strength of character enough—hardly, I think."

CHAPTER XII.

COUNTERPLOT.

THE sick Miss Palmer meantime has been slowly recovering. Now she is sitting up, attended by the affectionate old landlady—now she is able to go out for a drive. The busy head of her mother was full of schemes. She was thinking of the young gentleman of fortune and position who had been introduced at that fatal St. Ryder party, and who had manifestly been struck by Miss Palmer's charms. The young gentleman had called several times, and the kind landlady, opening the door to him in person, had traced in his features and the tone of his inquiries all the gradations of tender interest and hopeless attachment. Young Mr. Orrell was indeed much struck, and, as Mrs. Palmer had ascertained, was wholly and splendidly *sui juris* ;

could walk in any direction without check from guardian, Lord Chancellor, or *mother*—a class of person that Mrs. Palmer always wished had no relation to young men of fortune. By-and-by she saw this youth herself in the drawing-room—took him in hand, as it were—brought him friendly messages from the patient which her own prompt imagination furnished her with ; and in short had everything in train to hand her child over to this admirer on her earliest recovery. Who are the foolish men that chatter about the inferiority of “the other sex,” when we see these busy clever women about us, in crowds, married to those splendid and superior Lords of the Creation (as the Lords themselves call each other in compliment) ? How clever—how far-seeing—how full of tact ! Never failing, never tiring, and never selfish. Let us run over that pile of cards together, and, taking stock of all our friends, say where lies the balance of cleverness—with the husbands or the wives ? Is it with simpering, fatuous Smirkington, who talks fluently at a dinner, and thinks he should be in

office somewhere, but whom the most barefaced compliment will turn into a child? or with that lady whom he has made Mrs. Smirkington, and who "could buy and sell him;" and who, without forwardness—but by her own simple diplomacy—has handsomely established her three portionless daughters? The niceties involved in that operation—the skill, the diplomacy, of that quiet, unselfish lady—certainly exceed all the delicate manœuvres of the great Taganrog Treaty of which we have heard, and for which Lord Gingerly got his Peerage. In fine, to narrow the issue, will Smirkington and his brethren ever do so much for their sons as Mrs. Smirkington and her sisters have done for their daughters?

But Miss Palmer was not co-operating—often a gratuitous difficulty with these poor labourers. Indeed, her mother had hardly taken her into confidence. The daughter was indeed thinking of two things—was pining to be well, and to do away with that one fatal false step. Her friend came to her very often, and was not idle. But, as we have seen, her exertions had not been attended

with serious profit. Helen came very often, and sat by her bedside; and the two interchanged their sorrows, and laid their little plans. Need it be said that both concurred, as taking pretty nearly the same view of the heroine of this narrative?

Helen had flown to her in her later trouble when she had noted the strange change in Doctor Cameron. She had poured out all her sorrows, hopes, and fears into that sympathising heart. But to Miss Palmer this apparent defection of the stern doctor had struck something like terror.

"Do you not see?" she said, starting up. "I know what she intends. Your poor, poor father, he is ill and failing, and she hopes, and means to, afterwards——"

"What?" said the other, looking at her aghast. "Not *that* surely!"

"I know it. I am sure of it," said her friend excitedly. "She will stop at nothing—she will do anything to forward this plan. O, that I were well! But I am here helpless."

"And I am helpless too," said Helen; "and I have no friends to help me. Mr. Severne is——" She was going to say "infatuated," but a look at the other's face checked her in time.

"No; we have no friend," repeated the other.

Suddenly Miss Palmer clasped her hands. "I know now! There is a friend. You remember that rough, good fellow. He was at Digby, and was very kind to me. There is goodness in his eyes. What is his name?—O!——"

"Selby," said Helen.

"Ah! but he *cannot* be a friend. He is for *her*."

"Nothing of the kind," said the other eagerly.

"Try him. I am confident of him. You know him; he has been always in the country. I do not know when he will be back."

"Try, try," said the other; "we must try everything. I tell you there is no time to be lost—now that grim doctor has gone over to her. O, that fatal night! If I had not listened to my own foolish pride and sense of dignity, this would

not have happened. I have deserved it all, and *she* cleverly turned it to *her* profit. Yes, go to Mr. Selby; assure him I never got that letter. He has influence with Severne. He will believe *him*, though he will not mind *us*. What a night!" she went on in a reverie; "how little I dreamed that so much was depending on it. I should have known that I was no match for *her* strength. She had planned it all before. But how did she learn it—the news of Severne's trouble? That always has puzzled me."

"O, she heard it in the room; and besides, got a letter *from*—yes, from this very Mr. Selby."

"He wrote it to her. Why?"

"Yes. She said so: we were in the hall, and a man in a white coat came in and gave it to her."

The other looked at her a moment, then clasped her hands, and cried out—

"My letter! The letter he wrote to me! I know it. It *is*. Dear child, you must go to Mr. Selby. This will clear all up. I see it now! Mine and yours too. It will help us all.

Run to him : lose not a moment ! Everything depends on this."

Mr. Selby had actually returned some two or three nights before ; and on the morning that Mrs. Lepell met her step-daughter on the stairs was sitting in his bachelor lodging reading his letters and newspapers, when his servant came to tell him there " was a young lady in a cab at the door." A most shocking and improper act on " the young girl's part : " one to be condemned, too, by every young person brought up in strict principles of religion and decorum. Yet surely we, who know something of what was going forward in that unhappy Home, may well pardon this venal infraction of the laws of Holy Society. And Selby, also decently brought up, what should *he* have done according to the same constitution ? He went, however, to the door, and recognised Miss Lepell at once.

She would not come in at first ; but at last was persuaded. He was puzzled as to what could be her mission. But without preface she went at once into her story—her griefs—her

apprehensions—her miseries. She had no friend—no one to advise her—all were against them in *that* house; and therefore she took this strange proceeding. He knew Mr. Severne. He was *his* friend. Mr. Severne was prejudiced against her.

“My dear young lady,” he said, much mystified, “what is all this coming to? What do you want me to do for you?”

A little confused, she continued her story, and then asked him had he written a letter to Mrs. Lepell on that night telling of Severne’s trouble.

“Not I,” he said, “I was away in the country, I am sorry to say.”

“Then you must do this,” she said: “tell *him* that his letter never reached Miss Palmer—that I saw Mrs. Lepell receive it myself in the hall, and take it from the messenger, who wore a white coat. I did indeed; and she is quite innocent..”

More in detail she explained all this to Selby, who was a “good fellow” as described

by Miss Palmer, and entered into the young girl's sorrows most heartily, though his own inclinations were with the lady who was the unconscious object of all these proceedings. His face grew troubled as he listened, and he was a little curious at the same time. "I tell you what," he said, "this may be a mistake all the time. But there is no harm looking into it. I'll find out our friend in the white coat, and make out to whom he gave the letter. Meantime, Miss Helen, you say nothing about it, and I'll speak to Severne. We dine to-day at Sir Duncan Dennison's."

He was a little disturbed. He had been a great believer in Mrs. Lepell, but latterly had met with neglect from that lady. He was in the humour for curiosity and suspicion. There were some tangled nets gathering about the feet of Mrs. Lepell. She could not think of *everything*. This little foolish matter might yet turn out awkwardly.

CHAPTER XIII.

DINNER AT SIR DUNCAN'S.

THIS was the evening of the great Physician's feast. He was a cheery, good-natured man, that enjoyed the world, though "well on," as it is called. That old phrase of "too old;" for that and "too old" for this, or of "in my young days I liked *that*," are now happily worn out; for the old now happily keep up stride by stride with the young—are not left up in the window while the gay procession goes by below. All honour to the jocund veteran who pays life the compliment of keeping up with it in good heart, good spirits, good lively ideas, and good clothes of the cut of the day, until the fatal knock is heard below.

Sir Duncan's cheerful little meals were liked. He had good company: not your official men of

wit, or professional soul of "capital things;" but your "pleasant" people, who are cheerful without being boisterous, who have no cut-and-dried "stories;" but can tell something that is "amusing" or interesting.

On this day came a husband and wife who were not only conventionally supposed to "get on" well together (there are many who would infinitely prefer being asked out separately, but the rigorous laws of the dinner party require their joint attendance), but who really liked each other, and did not ignore each other before company, as is pretty often the case. They were Mr. and Mrs. Adams—tolerably young—and Mrs. Adams was handsome enough to be an ornament to the table. Mrs. Selby was there also; Mr. Severne and Doctor Cameron. That physician's colour came into his pale face as he saw the other, in great spirits and exultation, talking at the fire-place. But Severne was seen himself to go up to him, greeted him soberly, and said—"I am so glad you have come, Doctor Cameron. We shall have a very

pleasant little party, and I should not have wished you to have missed it." A curious light was in the Doctor's eyes. He had a feeling of superiority—*of pity almost*—for the other. The words she had said came back on him like sweet music: that it was *intellect and the strong mind* that could control *her*. There—the door opened. She comes.

He was proud of her—poor infatuated man—as she entered. She never certainly had appeared so brilliant—so retiring, so modest, so elegant—even in earlier days. Her dress was even rich, and in the best taste. Who would not be nervous coming by herself? "Forward," "odd," some of Mrs. Adams' precise friends would have said—not thinking that Sir Duncan's was an exceptional place. He had long since got out of the jurisdiction. A young girl might go herself to that house. "Sir Duncan will *chaperon* you," the mamma said. Wonderful eyes; wonderful hair; wonderful colour on her cheeks. No one *before* had ever dreamed these elements could flash out so brilliantly; but the

events of these later days—the excitement, the uncertainty of what even that night might bring forth—could well account for this change. Sir Duncan welcomed her gallantly. He liked a lady, he said, that had “go” in her; and had told Mr. Adams her little story. “A poor broken husband at home, won’t last any time; been ill this long time—not that I say she is quite a night nurse.” And he looked knowingly. She put her hand into Doctor Cameron’s with an air of trust and confidence that the other seemed to understand. She half-whispered to him—“Such a scene as I had to go through to get away.” Her eyes added, “Heaven help poor me!”

“Severne, my friend,” said Sir Duncan, “you are not as lively to-night as usual. A lucky fellow like you has no business to be out of spirits.”

Severne walked over without answering, and sat down beside Mrs. Lepell. “We have had such news to-day. That poor lady—the widow you know—is very ill indeed, and has written

over wishing to see his Lordship. A little unreasonable, I think ; a man at his time of life is surely exempt from such requests. I shall have to go too."

She started. "Go !" she said ; "and when ?"

"Oh, in two or three days, I suppose, I cannot *bear* the notion."

Really, a man of that time of life, and with his infirmities—— She was really disturbed. The grand current that had been hurrying forward so triumphantly was checked. And then she asked "For how long ?"

"Oh, who can tell !" he said impatiently ; "it upsets everything. A foolish woman's whim ! Who knows how long ? Months, or a year perhaps. I am, of course, bound to him. He expects this attendance, just as everything was getting smooth. I had plans for you."

"For *me* ?" she repeated in a low voice.

"Yes, for you. I had laid them all out myself. I assure you I amuse myself thinking of what I will do for you. I suppose you could not be

persuaded what a deep interest I feel in you and your position. Something has always told me that our destinies are not to be separate."

"And I believe in that too," she said ardently.

"You don't believe in dinner?" said Sir Duncan cheerfully. "Here is my arm being offered for some seconds. Come, let us lead the way."

It was an inspiring little feast at a good-sized round table; flowers, lights, elegant china, good wines, and exquisite dishes. (Had not Lord Northfleet tried to steal away the doctor's cook? —a shabby trick!) Sir Duncan himself did not disdain to give a friendly hint. When there was something of special merit on its travels around, who can have sympathy with the narrow-hearted precisians, the dinner martinets, who think it bad taste or bad manners to know anything of what they set before us? A larger-hearted policy has begun to obtain. These are ghouls. There are those of rank who have applied to the Fish twice. They do not know this.

Doctor Cameron was next to Mrs. Lepell, by an accident. He was, indeed, avoiding the place; but as he hung undecided, it became the only one open. Perhaps he was aggrieved already by that confidence before dinner. But she whispered him presently—"You saw Mr. Severne was whispering me before dinner. It is a secret, mind; and he must not know that I have told you: so keep your eyes fixed upon your plate. He is going away!"

This news was so unexpected—perhaps so welcome—that he had almost forgotten his caution, and repeated aloud "Going away!"

"Yes," said she, softly. "He is going away for a long time to the Continent. Are you sorry? Yes—no?"

She read Joy in his eyes. "But," he said eagerly, "you are sorry."

"You would not think it the truth, if I told you what I really think. I will confess this much: it may prove a *sort of relief* to me—an absence of a *kind of restraint*, for *I do feel*—a—sort of gratitude, you know; but still——"

What could that Doctor make out of these words? Whatever he drew from them, they were more exhilarating than the champagne that he was now pouring into his glass.

"Yes," he said, with sparkling eyes, "I can understand—perfectly."

"Now," said she, confidentially, "we shall say no more. Will you do one thing for me? Talk to *them*—show them the empire of that brain, as a favour to me. I shall take pride in your success—you know I shall."

There seems to be a kind of social Fate who looks after little openings, chances, &c., almost too trifling to be referred to any less-important dispensation. And this deity is perverse and malignant, and sometimes kindly and generous. It put it into Sir Duncan's head, precisely at this moment, to ask a question of Dr. Cameron.

"You were out there, you know, and were a careful observer. *Do* the natives there eat their prisoners?"

Here was the opening. What man, stimulated by such encouragement as he had received, would

not have shone? With great information and a good deal of humour, he told what he had seen. His neighbour was perhaps his most reverential listener. The dinner was very pleasant. We should have heard Mr. Adams next day at another dinner quoting him "as an exceedingly acute, dry, and pleasant Scotch physician, who was just come from those parts cold as, &c."

When the ladies were gone, Selby drew over his chair next to Severne, and began to whisper to him eagerly. We know what the subject of that talk was. But Selby had been busily at work all day.

"I am sorry to tell you, Severne, it has turned out just as the young girl said. I am afraid she is full of little schemes, to speak mildly. With great trouble I made out the fellow in the white coat, and he described the woman to whom he gave your letter—or, rather, who took it from him—to a T. It was not Mrs. Palmer; for he could take his oath, he said, it wasn't an old girl nor a young girl; and then went into a perfect

carte de visite of our friend upstairs. These fellows have observation, you know, and keep their eyes about them——”

“I dare say,” said Severne, moodily. He had been displeased with her behaviour during the dinner. “Nothing more likely. I suppose she thinks, as I am going away, nothing more is to be got. Yes, I suppose she is a schemer like them all.”

“Well, you see, you have done injustice to that poor girl, who has suffered for it.”

“Yes, yes,” said Severne, hastily, “and I am sorry for it. Still, she stood by me that night, gallantly. I must be grateful——”

“Miss Palmer !”

“No, no ; the other. Her coming off and paying her little money that she had scraped and saved.”

“Well,” said Selby, hesitating, “I must tell you about that also. But I thought she had told you. That was a joint plot of ours—I mean the money.”

“What, yours ! my dear Selby ? How kind of

you. But she—I *forced* her to take it again—sent it to her in a week.”

They both sat looking at each other.

“Severne, send on the wine, will you? Try that claret—clart, As an Irish gentleman said, All the good drinks, you know, are in one syllable—Port, Sher’, Clar’t, and Spurts.”

Severne passed on the wine mechanically.

“But it was to be a secret; and you have only just come back. She has not had time to tell you.”

“That may be the reason,” he said. “Give her every chance.”

“I tell you *I’ll try her to-night*. But still, it was an odd thing. Ah! I begin to be afraid. We’ll see what she will say.”

Severne remained moody and *distrain*—was even impatient.

“Having to go away, too, in this way. I like to see everything out. Do you know, I see something in that woman that is to me different from everything else. *Her face, figure, manner, speech, look, and mind, taken separately, are all*

pretty much of the ordinary run ; but, Selby, there is a *general air* about her—a look that she puts on at times—that haunts me, and which I cannot put out of my head.”

This was indeed something of the secret of our heroine’s success ; and some of us must have met in our lives a stray person whose charm was this indescribable bloom, as it may be called.

“ But she is married,” said Selby, gravely and looking at his plate.

“ How absurd,” said Severne, impatiently. “ Who is talking of that ? ”

Sir Duncan did not relish this confidential talk and illiberal subscription to the common stock, which, indeed, any professor of manners and ceremonies must condemn as unfair to the host and his company. They presently went up ; Severne in a very disturbed state of mind indeed. Mrs. Lepell was with the ladies, scarcely “ holding her own.” Indeed, her sex, injured by outrage and by open preference, and rejection as open, can revenge itself on an enemy blessed with more attractions. But with the rising in the

horizon of other black bodies, all is set right, and there is the handsomest indemnification.

She saw the trouble on Severne's face. What must she have set it down to but to the annoyance and grief at his own departure. Had she been wiser, and thought of Selby—but the curious flurry of that night upset more than the wits of one. How was she to know? There was he, now beside her, speaking softly with his musical voice, and listening with worship, as she fancied, to her. Was he not talking of eternal obligations—of that night, the thought of which had for him always a curious fascination?

"And your bringing me your little store?" he said, very earnestly, looking into her face. *"Your own little hoard?"* Without intending it, he leant on the word *"own."* *"Gathered, I suppose, for something—for the house—was it not? And there was besides the uncertainty—or rather the certainty—that I would never repay you."*

She looked down. Not a suspicion crossed her. It was evidence of fast devotion—of

chains. If she had only looked at his eager face she might have seen his doubting look, and the work of that and the next night have been prevented. But she answered: "Had it been double, you were welcome to it."

"Some little store for the house—furniture—dress—what not? I *know* it was; and this I ran the chance of robbing you of. And your husband, he must have known—there was the risk *there*."

"I should not have minded *that*," she said calmly. "It can be laid out still."

It did indeed seem to her a blissful night: she always liked this hero of ours—his nature, his frankness, and his devotion to her were very pleasing. The party was now breaking up. Sir Duncan was not very well pleased with some of his guests; and it had not been as agreeable and lively as usual. But then, when had the guests been so absorbed with matter of such dramatic interest? Going down, she said to Severne, who was still uncertain.

"I shall wait at home for you all to-morrow.

Time—that sweet interval—will slip away only too fast ; and after you are gone——”

Her tone was inexpressibly melancholy. Beyond was Doctor Cameron, watching. But he, too, was elated. His rival was going away. As she went out, she ran over and whispered : “ Won’t you come and see your patient to-night ? *Do.*” Then Severne put her into her hired carriage. For a moment she looked out, and saw him standing in the light in the door-way, with that curious look of doubt and despondency ; then he turned away slowly. For long after, that vision came back upon her—dramatic—pleasant to think on. *For it was the last time she ever saw him.* And even this night was to bring about strange changes.

CHAPTER XIV.

STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

BUT her feeling was one of triumph and victory. She threw herself back in delight. "Everything falls out as I want it: even what seems to oppose me. This going away is the best thing: why, he is ready at this moment to run away with me, if I proposed it."

And the other grand schemes came pouring on her brain. The time was short. There was need of resolution and promptitude. Once *he* was gone away, she saw *this* clearly—that all was at an end. Time and distance are woman's greatest enemies. Before the carriage stopped she had all ready in her mind. She got out and went into the parlour, taking her lamp in. It was no more than ten o'clock. She stood at the table waiting. Just as she had a foreboding in the

dark carriage, the old trial was waiting her. There was no light in the hall ; but above, over the banisters, there was a flickering light. It came jerking down, and a figure that was like a ghoul, or one raised from the grave, stood before her. A common night-light, dim and flaring, and that showed a figure—oh, so thin and miserable—faint eyes, worn cheeks, and the presence of death itself. Can we not fancy that incoherent torrent of reproach and self-bewailment? She was killing—all were killing him. It only wanted a little more. She was cruel, false, wicked, shameless! Cursed be the day that he had met her. She had brought ruin, desolation, wreck with her. Cursed, again, be the day that he had met her! She was an evil demon. She had *betrayed him*, and *for hereafter*: there was to be no rest for him here or hereafter. Oh, such happiness! To have bartered away a pleasant home and his darlings who loved him—and for whom? He would have given her his heart's blood, but now she had destroyed him for ever and ever. There was no hope, no mercy, here

nor hereafter. The demons were waiting for him, and an endless eternity of expiation. Nor could he rest even here. He had no sleep—no repose. They denied him even that. No—he was *lost—lost!* And he deserved it.

There were other listeners to this shocking burst. His miserable daughter had stolen down behind, and with her hand on his arm, was piteously imploring him to go up. The servants were beyond in the Hall, listening awestricken in the dark, as the quivering utterances rose through the house. Awful and spectral night, to be told of hereafter in many a service. Now one of them ran softly to open the door, for they had heard a ring. It was Doctor Cameron.

As he entered, the other turned his frantic eyes upon him with a cry. “Ah, you have come! You are with the rest—you are in the league. She has brought you round like the rest! Look at him, dressed out for their parties! It is he who has pronounced my sentence. He has brought all this on me, and will not let me rest; he will not let me sleep, though he has the power

to do. Will no one take pity on me? Will no one befriend me? *You* have no strength, my poor child; and you will want help yourself very *very* soon."

They at last got him away. The doctor and Mrs. Lepell were standing looking at each other. As the door closed, Patty looked after them distrustfully. She was not one to listen at the door, or she would have heard a strange and hurried interview: strange and eager whisperings of more serious things than had ever been discussed in that parlour, though it *had* been a lawyer's once.

She began at once: "Heaven help me! How long are we to have these scenes? Dearest Doctor Cameron, you are my friend. You like me, I know, and would do much for me. Help me—advise me—give me your aid and strength; for I now see that you are the only one to whom I have to look."

"You know," he answered, "what I would do for you—that my heart, and strength, and brain are all at your service."

"It is not that," she said, agitated, and leaning against the chimney-piece. "I want you to aid me—to stand between me and temptation—to *save* me, as you alone can. If you pray, pray for me."

He smiled bitterly. "Once," he said, "I might have done much in *that* way. What is this coming to?"

She came up to him and dropped her voice into a whisper: "I told you what he said, though it was a secret. He is going away. He cannot bear the thought of it, for he likes me—shall I tell you plainly—*loves* me."

"I thought so," he said, fiercely. "I have eyes. You have only found this out now?"

"That is not my fault," she said, hurriedly. "Does it follow that I love him? But what if he has gone further? You saw him to-night—his trouble—his silence—his confusion. Do you know what that meant? All that journey was heavy on his mind; and at the end, before we went away, what if he had proposed to me *to go with him*?"

Both stood looking at each other for some moments. Neither spoke. "I see it on your lips," she said. "You are thinking 'she will go.' Ah, you little know me. Though, indeed, *after to-night*, and these horrible scenes, who could blame a poor helpless woman for seeking any release? I ask you, is it to go on?" she went on excitedly. "Am I to be branded in this city as something disgraceful and degraded? Am I to be worn into the grave with these mad and savage attacks? I tell you, Doctor Cameron, I can stand it no longer. *I will* not endure it. I leave this house. I have made up my mind. It is a hell to me. It is wearing my life away. And, Doctor Cameron, I tell you plainly, *I am driven to accept any shape of release—I care not what it is!*"

He almost gasped out: "But you will not go—surely not. You do not mean——"

She put out her hand to him, with a smile which was "almost seraphic." "No—no—no. I would rather suffer to the end. But that is what I came to you for. *They* would drive me to

leave him; but *that* shall never happen. *You* must find some way of release. You know—need I tell your heart where my regard is? You must have guessed it long, and seen what I tried hard to conceal.”

“Gracious Heaven!” he said, with almost a groan. “What is all this?”

“Yes,” she said. “I feel there is some happiness left—some to come for me. Surely I was not born expressly to be wretched! Is there not some indulgence for a poor, hunted, persecuted woman? I know—I feel there is. No! no! Be at rest on that. I shall die before I do what he wishes me to do. But still, what is to become of me? If I stay and if I suffer, *I stay and suffer for you.*”

He stood looking at her a little wildly—his breath came and went—but he could not answer.

“Find some way. If you care for me, you will. *He* is ready to give up all for me. You, if you really liked me, could do no less. Even, if you chose, you could save me from this cruel degradation before a whole household. You could

keep this man, who has some morbid hatred against me, tranquil and quiet. Let him have his way, if he wishes it. Let him sleep if he will; it would seem to me the more charitable course. The end cannot be far off. We have done what we could, and tried to save him and soften his suffering. But we cannot give him life—that worthless, wicked life which he used only to destroy the life and peace of others. Oh, save me—save me! Help me, dear Cameron. You are the only one friend left to me on earth.”

Her head sank down—she seemed about to fall. But he remained in a sort of stupor, passing his hand across his forehead.

“Think it over,” she said, with a soft imploring voice. “You will devise something. Time is flying by telegrams may come, and they will have to go at once. I shall come again. Never fear, and never doubt *me!*”

She was gone. Her voice long remained ringing like music in his ear; his brain was in a whirl. “It is true what he said, that there are

demons beside us, hurrying us away to eternal ruin. I feel them—I hear them now——”

There was no demon beside him then. But a soft face was looking down on him, full of pity and sympathy.

“Dear Doctor Cameron,” she said—it was the voice of Helen—“you must not mind; papa spoke a little unkindly. But you know the state he is in. I know you perfectly and thoroughly, and how good and true you are, and how you wish to do what is right, but are beset with these cruel difficulties and temptations. I know what has been going on all this time, and what snares have been laid for you which no one could resist, but which I have tried to aid you in resisting.

“You!” he said. “How? Snares, indeed! Ah! but you know not how I have fallen, how I have listened, or how little all my pretence of goodness has aided——”

“Yes it has,” she went on, “I have seen it, and I have prayed, oh! prayed so for you and for our miserable selves, who want aid so much

more. And I think our prayers have been heard, or will be heard. Who would not listen to the prayers of a weak, unhappy, desolate child, whose father is wasting slowly out of the world, and about whom misery and misfortune are fast gathering, and whose only hope for herself is to die speedily? Surely God will grant that prayer. Oh, dear Doctor Cameron, pray, pray with me for strength and aid! And you will not add to our miseries yet more by turning against us at the end."

He turned and saw her on her knees, with her hands up in prayer, and her lips moving, and her cheeks, from which watching and almost privation had removed the bloom. There was something so piteous and touching in the sight that he ran to her and raised her.

"God will assist you, and I *feel* He will stand by *me*, who need it so much. Oh pray, *pray* for me," he added, with passionate entreaty, "and He will give me strength."

"You are true and good," she cried out with exultation, "as I always said you were. But you

must do more ; you must leave us—fly from this place.”

He started—he recollected. “No—yes—it is the only safety.”

“Dr. Pinkerton was here this evening for you, and left this note. He says you must decide to-morrow. The ship is actually in waiting at Gravesend. It seems a providence—a special opening—and you will be your old self again.”

“It is, it is,” he cried. “But it is more a providence sending such an angel to me. Listen. I obey. Oh, you have saved me, dear ; for on this very night I should have fallen, and perhaps done such a—nay, a few minutes later——”

“*What would have happened a few minutes later, Doctor Cameron?*” said a voice behind, stern and cold. A figure was standing at the door : a face contemptuous and scornful was looking down on them. “Doctor Cameron,” it said, “what have you decided ; or have you forgotten all that passed only a few minutes ago ?”

But the young girl was on her feet in a

moment, and standing between Doctor Cameron and the other. She indeed seemed a guardian angel.

"No," she said, eagerly, "you have no power over him now. He is free. He is going away—he is saved. O do not listen to her," she said, imploringly. "I know you will not. Pray—pray."

Only for a second he was irresolute, only from the surprise. He began to move calmly to the door.

"Pray! pray!" repeated Mrs. Lepell, with something like a scoff. "We might think this the prison scene in 'Faust.' What, changed again! Take care you do not change once more! Only bear this in mind, I have neither time nor patience for such vacillation."

He still moved—he was at the door.

"Going," she said, bitterly; "a precious ally, indeed—so soft, with all his sense. He will accept any story they tell him! Mind, there is no going back after this. Don't dare to come to me."

The colour came into his face at her taunts, but he could not answer. The young girl looked on in an agony of suspense. He said nothing, and was gone—gone. Stray passers-by saw a man rush furiously from the house. The young girl looked at her step-mother with eyes of joy and thankfulness. The whole scene was not indeed unlike Faust and Marguerite. Who would be so ungallant, though, as to liken the heroine of this story to the dangerous person in the scarlet dress and cock's feather? and again, unlike that dramatic incident, Faust has been saved by the prayers of Margaret. Saved he was certainly; for the next night the *Conway Castle* dropped down from Gravesend bearing emigrants, and among the officers of the ship was DOCTOR CAMERON.

CHAPTER XV.

A PLAN.

BUT that night was not over yet. It was about eleven o'clock. The young girl had gone up with joy in her heart, and thinking there was some hope left in the world still. She listened at her father's door, and heard his mutterings. Then she stole in softly, and sat by him and soothed him, though she was very weary.

Any private speculator would have been confounded at the change in Mrs. Lepell, as she got to *her* room, and stood before the glass. She was in her finery; but in spite of all the decorations, her face seemed actually contorted. Was she in a fury? "The fool! that I should have wasted time and labour on quite a fool." She flung herself into a chair, her opera cloak still on, and sat there beating her foot impatiently.

This miserable weak doctor had overthrown all her schemes. It was a pitiful desertion. It upset everything. Not indeed that "running away"—the fiction with which she had credited Severne. That gentleman, vacillating as he was indeed, would have been the last to propose such a step: but the time, she had a presentiment, would be narrowed. He would be gone in a day, and, once gone, all was undone.

Any readers who have watched this character through the various passages of her life, as described in *Bella Donna*, in *Jenny Bell*, and in the present narrative, will understand that she was a person that, with all her timidity, could be prompt and decisive when the moment for action arrived. Nay, that she was even as bold in planning suddenly as she was prompt in carrying out. Her face was still working with vexation, and contempt, and disappointment. For there are opportunities that will not recur. And there were dramatic scenery, background, footlights, &c., about that night's little piece which could not be so readily got together again.

But a hundred little plans were drifting through her mind, and at last, just as the clock struck twelve, she started up suddenly, and, with her cloak still on, stole upstairs softly and on tiptoe.

She passed his door, and paused to listen. She heard his old broken complaints and mutterings sustained like a "keen;" and heard, too, the soft, never-wearied soothings of that patient daughter. She passed on; went up a floor higher to Helen's room. There her light was burning on the table. In a moment she was hastily searching the place. There was not much to search, for the patient girl had accepted any little amount of furnishing that the lady of the house had thought would do very well for her. Visitors were not received there as in the drawing-room, where the gentlemen were made welcome; and there was no need of show, &c. A plain chest of drawers, of rather humble wood, was the strong element, and of this she tried the drawers. They were open; so she knew that what she sought could not be there. The bed;

yes! She turned down the pillow; and there, carefully secreted, she found what the faithful girl guarded so carefully. She seized on it—on them—in triumph, and stole down as she had gone up. She waited patiently in her own room, and could wait patiently. Time was less valuable now. It came to half-past twelve—three-quarters—one. Her foot still beat on the ground; the flowers and cloak were about her still. Her door was a little open, so that she could hear. At last it came. The young girl had done her filial vigils; and with her sigh, that her stepmother could hear, crept away upstairs for a night almost as miserable as that of her sick father. That patient lady, who had waited so long, could now wait some time longer, to make all sure, then stole up quietly once more, and entered her husband's room.

The dim light was burning in a dish, making flashes and flares that threw ghastly shadows in spasms about the room. The unhappy Mr. Lepell was sitting up on his bed, swinging to and fro and groaning to himself. The wild eyes were

turned on her more wildly ; and with the strained sleepless scars of long anguish. He stared at her with wonder, then shrank away, as if in terror, as she walked up to him.

He did not speak ; it did indeed seem to him a visit for some unholy purpose. She might have had a knife under that opera cloak.

"I am alone, helpless," he gasped ; "I shall call to them."

"Hush !" she said calmly and softly. "What are you afraid of ? I saw the light burning, and heard a noise, and feared something might be on fire. See, I am going away ; try and go to sleep, and get rid of such dreams."

"Sleep !" he groaned ; "I shall never sleep again, until the long, long sleep comes again. You and he have taken care of *that*."

"I !" she said, stopping. "But of course ; always the way. Poor me, of course. Take your medicines. *Here, here ; plenty I see*, and get rid of the nightmare." She took the lamp out of the dish, and brought it over to the large table, which was close to his bed ; then went out

in the same tranquil way, closing the door softly. But she listened, went away, came back, and listened again. After a while she heard him moving about again, and then a cry of what seemed joy—what she was waiting for, and then went away to her own room; where she lay awhile, and could not get to sleep, which provoked her a good deal, and made her out of humour; for she wished everything to go smooth with her, and power of sleeping to be as much under her control as she fancied she had men's minds. So ended that strange and, it must be said, most dramatic night.

CHAPTER XVI.

FINAL REPULSE.

Now it was morning again, and Patty came in to the faithful and affectionate daughter—dozing herself wearily—with news, good news, that the “blessed” sleep had come at last, as if it was a rainfall, and visited the long-suffering master of the house. This intelligence brought joy to that young face. She dressed herself speedily, and hurried down. He was indeed “fast”—not breathing heavily—his face turned to the wall—all excellent symptoms of the more natural sleep. She only looked in wistfully from the door, from afar off, at her treasure, then softly went away. Strict charge through the house that there was to be no sound.

The gracious and restoring mantle had also wrapped itself round the fatigued frame of the

lady of the house—though this was not until early in the morning. This blessing—hath it not its sweet degrees and qualities nicely graduated—showering itself down in abundant luxuriance on the child, who takes it as of course ; and coming wearily and with pain to those who have waited at the sickbed, and to the mourners whose strained wrung eyes have sunk inwards from mere exhaustion.

Mrs. Lepell was not to be disturbed, but would have her long rest, perhaps, until towards noon.

But a doctor's carriage was now at the door at nine o'clock. Doctor Pinkerton sprang out nimbly, and was in the drawing-room in a moment. He saw the young girl. "My dear child, you are very young," he said ; "and there is much on your little shoulders. But we must all look out and take what care we can. Here's Cameron been with me this morning after chasing me all through the town—to hospitals, and everywhere—and has told me all that took place last night. He is a noble fellow, and has gone down to his ship. And I tell you what, I wasn't

easy till I came off here. That *woman is a dangerous woman*; and cost what may, and in spite of all opposition, she shall not be left another night under this roof."

"O! I am *so* glad," she said, clasping her hands. "What I have been praying for. A country spot, green fields, trees—*that* will cure all—and we may be happy again."

"To be sure, you poor little watcher—my heart bleeds for you, so it does;—and will put colour into those cheeks again; and as for money and creditors, leave all that to me. The house or cottage is ready in fact. Now I must see him. Never mind about waking him. He may sleep too much. This is the best symptom as yet—a pure, natural sleep—without any of Dennison's quack Italian drugs, which, between you and me, I never did approve of. Bring them down, and the first thing we'll do will be to throw 'em out of the window."

The young girl flew up. "And I'll see about papa too," she said. "I *think* we had better not wake him."

"Poor, faithful child," said he, as she went out. "I wish I had such a daughter!"

In a moment she had met him on the stairs, scared and terrified. "They are gone!" she said. "There is only one left. There were three!"

The doctor looked at her in silence; then strode up, burst into the sick man's room; and taking him by the shoulders, had turned him over in a moment. In another moment his ear was at his heart. The two little bottles were on the large table, empty—next to his night-light, which had burnt out. "Possibly too late," he muttered.

The young girl behind him caught only the last word, and sank down with a loud cry.

* * * *

It is scarcely worth while going more into these wretched details. Desperate remedies were applied as desperately. There was wild rushing and hurrying. The sound of feet indeed roused the lady, who was sleeping late, and who came down wondering at the confusion. Desperate remedies

had their effect; and towards the close of day there were signs of life—a mere flicker. The deadly Italian potion, one of Sir Duncan's "hobbies," which later brought him into disrepute, and into one very awkward mess, had not indeed killed, but seemed to have sunk into the brain and brought on a sort of insensibility that appeared like idiocy.

But the question was—how had the unfortunate gentleman got at these fatal drugs? From Sir Duncan the story came, in his own self-defence—that it was the rash stupidity of the family, who had been charged to keep them under lock and key, and by whose carelessness the wretched man had got at them himself. Who was so excited about it at first as the gentleman's wife, and who so loud on the culpability of her step-daughter—openly accusing her that day before the house of not having the firmness, through her foolish affection for her father, to resist his cravings for this drug? She had heard her moving about ever so late.

The young girl listened, amazed, half wild with

suspense and grief, and burst out: "It was *she*—O it was! I know it. She was always plotting his death!"

Luckily there was only the doctor present. HE knew the truth. But who could prove it? The wretched man himself could not speak—and from that hour never did speak—being in a sort of heavy stupefaction that was next to idiocy. Who, she might say, as indeed she did, should dare to expose her, save indeed that Doctor Pinkerton, who, it was notorious, always disliked, and had been turned out of the house by, her? She had Sir Duncan's good word also, who protested she was as fine a woman as he had at his little dinners, and was greatly grieved when he heard of her being driven out of her house.

Severne never came all through that weary day, though she wrote notes to him, which were received when Mr. Selby was with him, telling him very grave particulars; and just as Mrs. Lepell had anticipated in the morning, came a telegram pressing instant departure, as the poor

lady was all but *in extremis*. She had, therefore, no aid to rely on but her own ; and, as any one who is at all up in events that affect the fashionable world well knows, the arrival of the present Lord Severne and his young relation, Harold Severne, Esquire, at Marseilles, was only too soon followed by the death of the lady, with that of her possible heir : an event which of course placed distinguished families in mourning, and removed the only probable obstacle between Harold Severne, Esquire, and the title.

Mrs. Lepell, therefore, had now no aid to rely on but her own self. She was scarcely a match for Doctor Pinkerton or the faithful daughter Helen : who no sooner saw her, during this and later days, than she would fall into a strange fit—half-mysterious, half-sober—and with cries and sobs denounce her as *her father's murderer*—in short, it was such a series of the most painful, “awkward,” the world would say, scenes, that she seemed wise in withdrawing and giving up the battle. Decency, surely, before interest, or even comfort. She might have made terms,

but that Doctor Pinkerton—always her pitiless enemy, and who had the administration of money affairs, &c.—sternly refused to treat with her in *any way*, as if he had some control or power over her; and it was known that she had but a small pittance indeed allowed her.

Much more reasonably might she complain of the conduct of Lord John Raby, who, from the friendly and intimate terms he was on with the lady, might have been expected to arrange matters for her. But when she wrote to him, and did not receive an answer, and then waited on him and was not received, *though she knew he was at home*, Lord John grew almost excited. “I won’t let that woman in! Don’t let her near the house!” he cried. He shrank from an *esclandre* as from an east wind, and had a morbid horror of his name “being dragged into any fuss or confusion of that sort,” as he said himself very candidly and openly. “I like people that go on in the regular way like every one else;” and from people decaying in purse or character he shrank

as from an infection. "At that supper," he said, "which little Perlet gave us in the year—no matter—where the police burst in, and I got away by saying I was an Englishman—egad, the only thing my country ever did for me—and I had to give them something else besides my name—— But, sir, as I was saying, I never saw my gold snuff-box from that night, though I knew that creature Perlet had it. But I was so afraid of getting mixed up in their infernal dirty questionings and suspicions, that I was content to go without it." Indeed Lord John was rather hard on our heroine, and seemed to be aggrieved or outraged personally. "I always knew what she was. I always said she was ——" and his lordship dropped his voice and made a face. But it was, however, at this time that he was dragged into concluding those negotiations which ended in his leading to the altar the well-known rich widow, Mrs. Laxey.

Though she was left without friends, and had to go forth on her weary travels, she left behind her a dismal house of horrors: for "though all that

medical skill could do"—as the phrase goes—was done for the unhappy owner, he never rose out of that state of dull insensibility, and did not even recognise the faithful saint of a daughter who had so long waited on him. She had to carry on another battle, for their affairs had fallen into disorder, and debtors and obligations had arisen; and when things were settled there was but a small income to support them. Idiocy alone—but idiocy and poverty combined—is a miserable combination.

For years this went on, when there came at last what was called "a happy release," and Mr. Lepell took away with him from this world that long account of weakness and folly—gentle names, always invented to cover what is in reality the strength of selfishness and the worldly wisdom of self-will. For her it was a release too; and it may be said that the patient watcher of late enjoyed some happy years: for there was one looking on who had long admired her sweetness and virtues. This was Mr. Selby.

Mr. Severne remained away a long time with

his noble relation—coming home now and again to arrange business matters. It was well known where he was and where he had been, for the world now took a surprising interest in his movements, and hotel-keepers found out there were numbers who were delighted to know of his arrival at Starridge's in Bond Street, and accordingly *affiché*d "Harold Severne, Esquire, and suite," as "sojourning" there. One matter that took up his thoughts was the arrangement of the Digby property—a matter which had now become a little troublesome. The propounding of that newly-found will, which had before seemed simple enough, now became suddenly embarrassing, by the change in our Mrs. Lepell's status and condition—in fact, the *esclandre*, as Lord John would say of that unlucky night.*

* The legal reader will see this in a moment. Counsel's opinion was taken on the matter, and Mr. Colter, Q.C. (what practitioner has not consulted Colter on Bottomry?) advised "arrangement." "Though Lord Mansfield, an eminent judge, has laid it down," Colter wrote, "that such a will was established of itself, by the destruction of the later document, and that such was the doctrine of the Common Law; still the tendency of later decisions was to throw the onus on the parties seeking

to establish the will ; and, besides an actual existence of the document, to require proof of surrounding circumstances and evidence of *intention to revive* the old instrument." On such a construction the only witness that could have been put forward was our heroine : and as she would have had to suffer cross-examination at the hands of the terrible Serjeant Ryder, the reader will see how nice the question was. The Delegates soon after decided Swabey's case, and Colter's view would seem now to be established.

CHAPTER XVII.

EPILOGUE.

THUS far we have attended the career of the lady, the leading incidents of whose life have been given in the present and two preceding narratives. In that life of hers, not destined to be a very long one, she had played some three or four games, as the phrase goes, of large interest, and on the whole played them unsuccessfully. Without once more affirming that Honesty is, &c., it may be said that the old humdrum course of decency, and perhaps stupidity, is the most profitable in the end: and that the dashing people who start from nothing, with their lively wits for capital—men who by sheer boldness make a desperate leap into Parliament, climb on bank arm-chairs, 'drive carriages, and eat and give splendid dinners—have but poor enjoyment

for their pains, and have no relish for the fine wines and rich meals. The thing somehow ends badly. So with the heroine of these stories, who, at the end of all, was in very poor condition, and in sore straits indeed.

This, I say, was her last venture of any serious character. And though she did not want heart or daring, or what Lord John would have called "game," yet the labour and disadvantages were now doubled. She had gone down, as it were, to a lower floor, and began again there. Somehow, too, what with the tribe of Lord Johns and their loud speech at clubs—what, too, with people who had known her at earlier stages, turning up fitfully, or coming to stay in town—her history was beginning to be known. She was marked, as it were. She was willing indeed to begin again and labour for her crust—even to take her bench and oar in the governesses' galley—but it seemed next to impossible. A married lady in that office was an objection: she could hardly be ranked as "a young person." Indeed, all the respectable ladies' professions seemed closed to her. But

she most regretted that of the directress of young ladies' education—a *carrière* which, like the Bar, leads to anything—to gentility, wealth, and rank. She met with sad rebuffs, too, in her laudable efforts to secure work. Cold looks, suspicions, were the least. It was like the unhappy gentleman in the well-known play, whom a series of awkward accidents had forced into the position of a criminal, who, when he received his honourable discharge with the proper card, could obtain no honourable employment. With persons of the class of our heroine, who have no established circle in which they can live steadily from tender years till they grow old, it is naturally too hard to trace anything consecutive of their career. If we look round among our friends, we shall find that all who answer to this description have for us a fitful irregular existence. Are they not now dead, now alive; are they not lost to sight for years; do they not “turn up” for a short space only to be again lost to view? This man could be found, and could tell a scrap of their history afar off in that hot

country; another has an experience of them in that distant cold one; we ourselves can supply something. But each knows but a fragment, and who shall bring the possessors of such fragments together? So it must be with our Mrs. Lepell—*née* Jane Bell—in whose life, as just mentioned, this closing business was the last serious venture. At most, but three or four glimpses of her life can be picked up.

Here is one which came through Mr. Canby. When the gallant Duke's Own (The Du Barrys) were going out to India, the fine screw transport which conveyed them took out a few scraps and detachments to join other corps. The Du Barrys were then commanded by LIEUTENANT-COLONEL PHILIPS, a distinguished officer who had seen no service, but whose achievements lay chiefly in bringing his regiment "to a high state of efficiency," and in suggesting and enforcing various plans which saved money to the Public Department, and which caused him to receive high and frequent commendation from the War Office. The colonel's lady was on board, as well

as the ladies of two poor lieutenants, who could not afford to leave their wives behind, or send them out overland. Some surprise however was freely expressed at this step on COLONEL PHILIPS' part, who was known to have saved a great deal of money, and "was uncommon well enough off." Indeed, it was said with some indignation that the colonel's lady, a gentle, submissive creature, had been put on board no better appointed than a sergeant's wife. The colonel said she was "devilish comfortable." He was very pleasant company to the young officers of the other regiments, and often sat and smoked with them in a little private corner of the deck, and was kept by them very handsomely in cigars all the voyage. It was only about the fourth or fifth day—for all had been tolerably ill—that Mr. Canby reminded the colonel of having met him before.

The colonel said, indifferently, "Most likely!" (He was not smoking one of Mr. Canby's cigars.)

"Don't you remember that old house Digby

and a Christmas party; it must be twelve or fourteen years ago?"

"To be sure I do," said the colonel with interest. "Uncommon good living there was there, too; I never ate or drank better in my life." (For though the colonel heartily grumbled at everything when it was present, he always did fair justice to what was past.)

"You know he died," went on Canby, eagerly, "that very week, I believe?"

"I heard all that," said the colonel. "And there was a greedy beast of a lord there, who must have well drunk himself into his coffin by this time, and a stuck-up fellow that has been screwed into a peerage since."

"And the woman that acted—whose husband was smashed on the railway—you recollect her, colonel? Fine colour she had, and eyes! Good heavens! I wonder what became of her. She went off with some fellow, I know. And what did she do with her sick husband? I haven't a notion. I never came across her since."

"I did, then," said the colonel, coolly, "and not so long ago, either." There was a major and a captain or so sitting round. They were all very comfortable—a moonlight night—ship going like a yacht. "I keep my eyes open," said the colonel; "never fall into abstraction as I walk. I'll tell you about this, for it's rather curious. When we came to Dublin, they first sent us to Beggars' Bush Barracks."

A young subaltern gave a guffaw at this name. "O, colonel—come now."

"You're young, my lad, and green, and don't know better. Don't interrupt, please. Devilish good place it was; quite snug rooms, and fine places that drew. Major's quarters nearly like your own house."

Pipes were withdrawn to allow of sapient head-shaking adhesion, with "No better going." "Uncommon good—there five years." "No better in the kingdom."

"Well, sir, we were very well off there until they must take it into their heads to move us. Some of their infernal Irish management. Just,

too, as I had my carpets down, and the place warmed and nice. And they sent us off to a hole—a positive hole—not fit to put a Christian officer in—no light or air, and every fellow squeezed on top of you. On my soul, I'd have preferred one of their damned Irish cabins, pigs and all. This was their Ship Street."

Again adhesion: "Know it well." "Back of the Castle." "Infernal den."

"Why," went on the colonel, "I had actually to take lodgings for *her*." He always thus alluded to Mrs. Philips. "There was no *room* for her at all. But we had to get through somehow. Those Dublin fellows arn't bad in their way—many a dinner I knocked out of 'em. And very well done they were, too. Best wine and cookery, very fair attempt indeed. But what can you expect! A set of wasting, spending fellows, squandering everything to make a show. The claret they put before me—uncommon good, too—I suppose hadn't been paid for, and never would be." This strain of recollection in reference to hospitalities is not uncommon among

gentlemen of the army. "And you know they've got a show there they call 'going to the Castle'? Levees and drawing-rooms, and——"

"I've been there—wretched sham of a place."

"Nothing of the kind," said the colonel, gravely. "I have had uncommon good dinners, a hundred of us sitting down together there in St. Patrick's Hall, and better attendance I never had. And devilish good company, too. And their balls and drawing-rooms were very fair. They fished out some very pretty girls, I can tell you. And the fellow himself was always very civil to me."

"But, hang it, he ain't no better than a lord at home."

"Now, my dear boy, don't show off your ignorance, please. He *is* better, because he stands for the Sovereign, don't you see. I never saw a better dinner set on a table. I assure you their vicerealty is a more sensible thing than you think."

"And was she there—Mrs. Lepell?"

"I'm coming to that. Well, as the man was civil to me, and the thing was expected, I told Mrs. P. she must get herself something and go to the man's Drawing-Room. I had no notion of her going about the thing in the way those harum-scarum Irish women did, covering their backs with laces and silks that they hadn't a sixpence to pay for. So I first took a walk myself down Nassau Street, a place that looks into a park."

"To be sure—Phoenix—know it well."

"You do *not* know it well," said the colonel. "Precious fellow you, to set up to know geography."

"Phoenix, miles away—know it well," said another.

"Exactly. Well, I was going along, when I saw a window-blind—I always keep my eyes open and look at everything—with the name, 'Madame la Rue, Milliner.' I saw with a glance this sort of thing would do for us. I had no notion of flinging away money on the regular gang who fleece you. So I walked in and asked

for Madame la Rue. I saw there was little or no work doing, only a cap or two on a wire thing, which was just the style of place I wanted. There was a woman to whom I soon explained everything—uncommon sharp she was. A very intelligent creature she was, and said that I only wanted something that would do well enough for *them*—cut up afterwards and make a decent Sunday dress. Just as I was walking downstairs, who should come stamping up, as if it all belonged to him, but young Hurst, a donkey in one of the heavy regiments, who was flinging away his good gold and silver right and left. Horses, mail phaetons, and all that. The fellow coloured when he saw me. ‘So *you’ve* found this place out, Philips,’ he said. ‘Very nice of you. I wonder does Mrs. Philips know?’ He always had a fair cigar-case (the ass’s bill to that Dublin fellow in Sackville Street I know was over a thousand), and was always forcing ‘em on you. So I merely said, as I went out, ‘I’m here on a little business *for* Mrs. Philips.’ On that the fellow burst into one of his horse laughs.

Well, Mrs. P. came another time, and I came again, and we were going on famously, and they were dressing her up very nicely and cheaply, and it was about a couple of days from the Drawing-Room. I knew they'd be late and behind time, so I kept calling and abusing them, just to keep 'em up. But I never saw Mrs. De la Rue. On this day I was coming up the stairs easily, when some one comes running down to meet me—not the creature that was doing for us, but some one else. It was all the same to me, so that we got our fallals, so I cried out, 'Come back here, please.' And so she did. And I assure you no sooner did I set my eyes on her than I knew her in a trice. 'Why,' said I, 'who are you?'—'Madame de la Rue,' she answered. 'Hum!' I said, 'is my dress done?'—'O, sir,' says she, with a sort of imploring menace, 'I thought you were Mr. Hurst. He *promised* to come and assist me, for I am harassed and persecuted. I don't know what I shall do.'—'I know,' says I, coolly, 'what I shall do, if you are not up to time, and that is, make a

row, the like of which you never heard in all your life.' What was her distress to me, in the way of business? 'O, sir,' she said, 'if you only knew all that is on my mind, and the way I am hunted at every turn. I could lie down and die; and *indeed* the dress shall be ready. But if you would not mind letting us have the small sum *now*, instead of later; we have so much to meet, so much to pay out.'—'Not a halfpenny, not a sixpence,' I said, plainly. I had no notion of being done in *that* way. 'And let me tell you, besides, if the things arn't up to time, I'll come down here and pull the place down—that I will, *Mrs. Lepell*, alias De la Rue.' You never saw any one turn so pale as she did. Then she said something about, 'O, sir, for the sake of those old days, take pity on us. Don't you remember dear old sweet Digby, and the happy nights there——.' I cut her short. 'Just take care you have my dress, ma'am; those days are nothing to me. So you needn't be afraid of my saying anything if you are up to time.' With that I walked out. Well, that

night, up comes a note, begging, praying, for the sake of dear old sweet Digby, and all that—But not a bit. Well, sir, will you believe it, we never went to the Drawing-Room after all, d—n her; and I lost the first banquet, d—n her, and all the nice people. It wasn't my fault, though, for I sent an orderly down two or three times just to keep his eye on the place. But the ruffian, I suppose, went to his pot-house."

"Well? But what happened her?"

"Well, I'm coming to it. I tell you I did not go, and I lost the banquet, the best one of the season. We drove up the day of the Drawing-Room to try on, you know, by appointment—for Mrs. P., between ourselves, never knows how to choose a decent thing to put on her back—and egad she was gone, sir; place shut up, and sheriff's men in possession. Her friend Hurst had cut—on leave, you know—a week before; and I believe there never was a stitch put in the train at all, good or bad. The whole was a blind. I didn't care about the Drawing-Room, but I lost the banquet by her. A hundred

sat down, they said—finest dinner they ever gave.”

So the story was told and speculated over, and served its turn, and perhaps was told once more during the voyage out of the *Serena* transport. That subject of the Dublin Castle “banquets” had a great charm for Colonel Philips, and his eyes looked back wistfully to those Irish flesh-pots.

! * * *

We may look again, and have another glimpse. We are on this occasion indebted to Lord John Raby. That noble person's marriage had long since been talked of, and perhaps laughed at; and had taken place with all splendour. We all recollect that half column in the fashionable journal, at St. George of Hanover's, and the Bishop of Leighton Buzzard—(the reader may recall Dean Burnaby, whom Lady Buryshaft had indeed promoted)—and the list of company, and the breakfast at the Earl of St. Ryder's at Audley Street. What came out later, however, was almost better known—namely, that Lord John had been “awfully taken in:” the fortune

turning out only about one-third of what was expected. This was indeed a blow. However, on the whole, the marriage proved a great benefit to him. It was noticed that Lord John was "kept in fine order;" had to give up his Paris trip—his haunts,—and came in time even to change his free-and-easy style of conversation. Every one marvelled. His rollicking spirits were tempered: he became sober and decorous, and even grave. He was actually the Lord John Raby who, now and again, spoke at religious meetings; and was known to have publicly reproved some free-spoken young men with great solemnity—"You shouldn't speak in that way. It is not becoming, sir; you know, for every idle word," &c.

But before this happy Reformation had been worked out—it took a long time—his lordship had gone down for what he called "an outing," to Chatham, to see his old friend Colonel Foley, who had a small post in that great establishment. As for going any distance purely to see "an old friend," that was not much in Lord John's way.

But there was some little festival on, or launch and dining, and his lordship's heart was heavy. and "so egad, sir," he told his friend, "the old lady was sick, and I bolted."

It was very pleasant down at the dockyard: and old Colonel Foley, who was very much of the same pattern as his friend, collected a few of the same description and gave a little dinner. Some of his guests were on half-pay; some on no pay at all; but all seemed to have strained eyes and rather "cherry-brandy" faces, and were well girthed and strapped. Some of these elderly gentlemen's recollections were of an odd sort: but they enjoyed them, and interchanged them, and seemed to gambol together like old nags in a paddock. Our Lord John considered himself far junior to any there present; and on the second night of his stay, he said: "Come Fol-ey, my boy, I found out you have a theatre here; and we'll bowl down quietly, and see him." His lordship had indeed been what he called looking about him, up the old lines; uneven walking enough for one of his

time; down to the "yard;" through the little streets, where the Quality live, and give little parties; then on to Rochester, where there is cheerful old crimson brick and a quaint air, which long may it preserve; and he had even stopped before the old almshouse, and, with his gold glasses on, had read the curious bequest of Master Richard Watts: the strict exclusion and uncomplimentary fellowship of "Rogues and Proctors," and the nightly supper and "four-pence each."

"Rum idea," said Lord John, closing his glass. "Sure to be jobbed." In which he was right; but he did not reckon on the certain security Master Watts was to have for his bequest in the grand notoriety of the Story of the Seven Poor Travellers, to be read by tens of thousands. It was on this walk, which tried him a good deal, that Lord John came upon the little Theatre Royal, Rochester, and with his glasses out again, read the bill pasted on the pillar of the little porch.

Mr. T. R. Houndsditch, the manager of the

T. R., Rochester, was once more appealing to his patrons of that circuit, and, anxious to spare no pains to secure continuance of that patronage, would bring forward on that night,

“A DEBUTANTE,
A Lady combining
HIGH BIRTH,
Elegant accomplishments,
and
NUMEROUS GRACES OF PERSON,”

who would on that night make her curtesy to the discriminating, refined, and combined audiences of

“CHATHAM, ROCHESTER, AND STROUD.”

“Egad, I’d like to see that,” said Lord John. “What’s her name, I wonder?” and he looked again. “Miss Jeannette St. Clair. Pish, pish!” and he made a face. “Jemima Smith, father a greengrocer.”

Accordingly Lord John and his host drove over in a fly. The little box of a theatre was filled. The pit had a mixed audience of sailors, soldiers, and roughs. The little boxes were

sprinkled with a few more decent visitors. We may let Lord John himself tell what followed.

“Egad, we bespoke what they called a private box, with access to the stage, sir; and all, I vow to Heaven, three shillings. Three shillings! why, sir, there was a day when I thought access to the stage cheap at three guineas. That was all very well when we didn’t think much of *The Four Last Things*, sir. Manager—Holdsditch, or some such name, found out devilish soon about me—and would hang about us, milording me till I was sick, and *had* to tell him to go to——; ahem—drunk, drunk as an owl. Came out to make a speech, and announce his new engagements; and began with something about the ‘blessing of the great Manager of All.’ Very good that; uncommon good that!—great Manager of All—though profane. Not right. Well, we got our bill, sir, and saw it was our old friend Haller on her legs again. I like the play; I do indeed; a devilish good moral at the end. Once, sir, a woman falls—a woman falls, sir, I should take a very high line. We’re all

fallible ; but with us it's *altogether* a different story. I always held that view. Well, I was growing impatient for her, and the other fellows were meandering on in the usual way, when, at last, on she comes. A fullish good-looking woman, rather fresh in the cheeks ; but a full growner : no 'Miss' at all in the case. I put up my glasses ; but that light is so infernal flaring and glaring, I couldn't make her out clear, and got the opera-glass. Egad, sir, she had begun to speak. She was as frightened as—as if she was going to execution ; but when she spoke, something struck me. I clapped the opera-glass to my eyes, and I knew her, sir ; I knew her on the spot. A woman that I could tell you stories of by the hour ; knew as well as I do you. And about whom there was as devilishly awkward a business, in a decent house—all about a husband," &c.

Lord John would come back presently to the narrative. "Not a word could any of us hear. I think she was shamming fright, and a boor of a marine in the pit called out 'Speak up,

missus ?' But she had forgotten the words, and came over near us ; when she looked up, and saw me, and knew me, begad. That finished her, sir. You never saw such a scene. You see she wasn't exactly the woman to go on that line of a first appearance : shyness, sinking from terror, and all that. That does very well, sir, in a *real* young creature of seventeen ; you and I'd have every indulgence ; and it's only right and proper, and charity, you know, that thinks no evil. But when it came to a stoutish woman, bearin' down on five-and-thirty or forty, and a little reddish about the cheeks, it was a different story, you see. But she had devilish fine eyes of her own, sir, and good hair ; and really when I saw her she brought back some of the old days," added his lordship, with a touch of pathos. " Well ; there she stuck, prompter actually bellowing at her, and old Holdsditch shaking his drunken fist at her from the wing. Then, sir, the fellows began to hiss and hoot : and one rascal threw an orange peel at her. And egad, sir, she showed the old stuff then ; she gave

them a look and a stamp; and I heard her myself say, 'Savages!' And, begad, the marines in front heard it, too; and stood up, and shouted 'Off! off!' at her; and half-a-dozen of the soldiers cried 'Shame!' and took her side, and began climbing over the benches to get at the marines. And there was going to be *such* a row; and I vow I couldn't but admire the *pluck* of the woman as she stood there, with her lips trembling, and repeating, 'Savages!' Oh, she had game in her: and do you know, I *think*, if they had given her a chance, she might have done something with Haller. But when I saw there was to be an out-and-out row, I and Foley cut—cut, sir. And I came up to Town early next morning," said this cautious lord; "for I saw the poor wretch knew me, and would be coming about the place with her story, and her old times, and all that. We know what that means—translated—and what it all comes to; I've never seen or heard of the woman since!"

* * * *

There was nothing indeed much to see or hear

of the unfortunate lady since that night. That *fiasco* seems to have been the specimen of a series of failures. What a weary profession had she entered ! What is there indeed open to a woman in her position ? Everything must fail. She can only try this, and that for a time. That pity which Lord John so morally denied to all Mrs. Hallers, we may have of one who was fighting this desperate battle. These were almost the last stories in any distinct shape that were known of her.

* * * *

Again, gentlemen, "officers and gentlemen," meet at the conventional dinner party, and talk pleasantly, when the ladies have gone up. The pleasant wreck is about them, snowy drapery, silver, exquisite glass, cooling and costly wines. Heliogabalus, in a dress coat and white tie, is filling and refilling, though growing purple about the "gills." Into what a curious club does human nature then resolve itself ! Innocent ladies and charming dames, you little know what is discussed there ; what strange talk

goes on ; what secrets are revealed ; and, above all, how your quiet husband, that family man for whom you feel so just a contempt, changes into Lothario, and talks gallantly and with a free and easy tone that would lift the very wreath off your head.

So may we hear them now chattering pleasantly. What has become of so and so ; where the deuce is so and so ? Mr. Fox Bouchier is there, and some one mentioning Legai, the charming French actor, now a manager and before the public a good many years, says he remembers a night at the Duchess' Theatre, when as queer an adventure took place as you'd see in any play ; and then proceeded to detail the odd and painful *esclandre* which was related in a very recent chapter of this narrative. "I wonder what became of her ?" said Fox Bouchier ; "I'd have given anything to have followed her up. She had spice and go in her, I can tell you. That woman has a history I know. She'll turn up again. I should like to know, really ;" and Fox Bouchier ran his fingers

though his rather thin hair, and looked round, as who should say, "I would follow the matter up." "Listen to that ass!" some one whispered at the other side of the table. "I wish we had Mrs. Fox down here to listen to him!" Our old friend Selby was of this party—a sober, grave bachelor, good-natured, kindly, but blunt to other men. He had been listening, and then broke in suddenly.

"I could tell you the end of all *that*," he said. He was not a gossip: was indeed a silent man. But the subject had an old and a soft interest for him: and often we talk thus to others, to please our thoughts, not to please *them*.

"I can tell you how all that ended. And it ended not so long ago either: not two years ago. There's Severne; you know him—that married Miss Palmer——"

"'Be sure!" said Fox Bouchier, critically; "saw her at a party; fine bit of colour for a viscountess."

"They had a box for the new opera—what's the name—a thundering business, you

remember ? like a dozen military bands pounding away together."

"My dear fellow," said Fox Bouchier, "what *are* you thinking of ? The great posthumous work, with the real earthquake—a masterpiece !"

"No matter," said Selby. "I am not a musician. Well, I went with them to *their* box ; Severne and Lady Severne ; and were all bored. It seemed as if it was going on steadily all night, in regular watches : you know that feeling. We got away at last, and left her at home ; and then Severne and I walked down together to the club. I hadn't seen him for ever so long, and we had a great deal to talk of. I needn't tell you he had a very curious life, full of ups and downs. He is in port now, so it is no harm to say so."

"No fellow better off, I can tell you ; uncommon good thing he made of it."

"It was a lovely night, with the moon out ; and we didn't go to the club at all. But we fell to talking over old times ; and actually about the very person you have been mentioning. I knew her very well ; and I knew her history. Her

life was a very hard battle, poor creature; all up hill, and yet driven down hill. I always pitied her. We wandered along, and went out of Pall Mall into Charing Cross; then up to Leicester Square and *that* direction. Turned out of *that* into a sort of street: the only reason for which was, I believe, that the moon was shining very brightly on it; and there was a little crowd half-way down it!"

"Quite romantic," simpered Fox Bouchier; "we are coming to something; I suspect, the viscount and his friend."

"It is very odd," said Selby in a ruminative way; "but there *is* some mysterious connection between our thoughts and outer things. I do not know why we should have begun to talk of that woman on that night. It was very curious: her name had never occurred to us on any other occasion."

"That *was* the reason," simpered Fox Bouchier. "Don't you see? the very reason explains itself."

"We walked on slowly," continued the other,

“until we were stopped by the crowd. A midnight row—you know that sort of thing—in front of a tavern, about one o’clock in the morning.”

“I know well,” says Fox Bouchier, “of course. Haymarket business every second night.”

“This was not exactly a tavern—more an Italian place. The ‘Café Magenta’ they called it; and it had a row of frosted windows with gilt letters on it. As we came up, we heard French and broken English; and there was a half-savage, drunken, dirty Frenchman, fighting with a woman in her hair at the door, and beating her. There were no police, as usual. ‘Look at that savage; and look at those savages,’ said Severne. And the savages, though they cried ‘Shame!’ laughed at all the man’s fury.

“The woman was dressed up in the usual showy way. You know the style of thing behind the marble bar; and the flaring gas and the gilt mirrors, ear-rings, and chains; but I declare, when we were just pushing our way through, as the ruffian had his arm up for another blow, she

turned her face, and said piteously, 'Is there no one of you to help a poor woman?' I say she turned her face: and, by Jove, I knew it; so did Severne. In a second we had shoved through them, and were beside her."

"Why, was it?" asked Fox Bouchier. "Really, now, how curious! Handsome woman, though, when got up."

"Ah! greatly altered, though," said Selby, sadly. "But there was just something of the old touch in her eyes, which I knew; and the spirit with which she faced the ruffians saved her. We were beside her in a moment. Severne took the command.

"'Stand back,' he said, 'you should be ashamed of yourselves. Are you no better than this degraded Frenchman, who isn't worthy to have the name of a man? If you raise your finger again,' he said to him, 'I'll knock you down—now.'

"She was looking at us with a strange look. She was beginning to know that voice. The fellow was rather cowed, and for a moment could not answer.

“‘I turn her out,’ he said. ‘She is a wretch. She rob me. I make no money. She have pillage me—and—and who are you? What is your business to interfere? — ‘Go in,’ said Severne to her, ‘I will take care of you. See, here are the police at last, so you had all better make off. Come in,’ he said to the man. We went in. It was a dirty, low place with a great deal of gas, and the mirrors just as we said, with a dirty waiter or two, with dirtier napkins. When we got the door shut, then the scene began. You would have pitied the poor wretch—so changed—all her spirit gone: and when she stood under the flaring gas, we could see that her cheeks were all shrunk in, and that the red colour *was* colour. Then, I say, the scene began. The Frenchman was like mad:—‘This woman—she ruin—where is my money? Here do they come asking—asking, and there is none to give them. She has got it all—she has plenty. Dey will hunt us out to-morrow Ah! you! I would kill you.’ She clung to Severne, who was very kind and generous to her. ‘You will help me,’ she said, in a

low, frightened voice. 'You will not let this man kill me. I have none of his money! Do you believe him? Look at the state he is in now. *I* have money! Look at me—look at these cheeks—look at that arm: I have not enough to eat—I don't know when—— Do you hear that?' And then she coughed, coughed, with a strange grating, scraping cough, that made us both start. I looked down at her figure, and I remembered she was a good, portly woman."

"Fine bust, I recollect," interrupted Mr. Fox Bouchier, critically.

"And I saw she was all shrunk up, and as flat as *that*. She was telling truth, *indeed* she was. I believe she was artificial and scheming enough—and perhaps her life would not bear looking into; but I declare I felt from my very soul for the wan, half-starved creature cowering and shrinking there, and with all spirit literally knocked out of her.

"'Look here,' said Severne, calmly to the man. 'Do you want some money?'

"'Of course I do. How can I pay my way?'

I shall be 'rested ; and what does that vile creature, who has plunder me——'

"The waiters were all listening indifferently ; they were used I suppose to these scenes.

" 'Hush, hush !' said Severne ; 'take this—that will do you for the present. Only please go away up stairs—anywhere. I happen to know this—this lady before—a long time.'

"I think she gave him a look of gratitude for that speech and for that word. My heart bled for her as I saw her in that degraded position, with her paint on, and her gewgaws hanging about her."

"Quite romantic," said Mr. Fox Bouchier, a sentiment that was not at all endorsed by the company, who were really interested in the story.

Selby looked at him, and said coldly, "It was *more* than a romance. I had met her at a country house at Digby, where we spent such happy weeks ! She was like any other lady there then—respectable ; and to find her come down to that was something of a shock. In fact, it makes me uncomfortable to think of the whole scene, and of the way she clung to us for help.

“The sight of the money made the Frenchman quite calm, and even polite. He was led away by one of his waiters. ‘Go away,’ said Severne to the other, putting something, I suppose, into *his* hand, ‘and leave us.’ There we were alone in that strange place, with the gas flaring away, and the mirrors and gold, and a patch of crimson velvet here and there. And on one of these crimson velvet sofas the unfortunate woman was sitting exhausted, with her hand to her side.

“‘I am so glad to see you again,’ she said. ‘It gives me life again. You don’t know what I have passed through since—the degradation—the misery. What could I do? Think the worst of me, if you please. I was driven—I did the best I could to be respectable. But the world would not let me——’

“‘Don’t think of that now,’ said Severne. ‘Tell us what we can do for you. You are ill, I think, in the first place. You would like to be free from this—this place?’

“‘Oh, that you should have seen me in this state,’ she said, covering her face. ‘Do you re-

collect Digby and Sir John—poor Sir John—and the book he gave me, “The Short Way”? I have it still. Those were days—oh, such happy days I *lived* then! But since—oh, you can have no idea what I have gone through. The misery—degradation. And yet I had my pride. I tried to live as a lady, and I made the best battle that I could. I had no money. What could I do? If I had been brought up a working woman—to a trade—anything. But I had not. Your half lady has no way of living; and all women were determined not to let me live. You were always my friend—and Mr. Selby, too. You were very kind to me: and though I did scheme and plot *to get my living*, as I live, I never schemed and plotted about you. I liked you all the time, and tried to make you my friend. And the proof,’ she said, sitting up, and with a sort of pride, ‘I knew you were in town’ here, and I knew where you lived; but I never wrote to ask you for anything—never! That comforts me at this moment. There is something of *the lady* in that, I think!’

“Severne answered her in a low voice. ‘You must leave this place—or I suppose you can stay for the night. In the morning we shall see what can be done. Think over some plan for yourself. I and Selby here will be too glad you had some mode of life more respectable than this. You have a great claim on me, a very great claim. I tried hard indeed to discover you all this long time.’ But for the future——”

“‘This long time!’ she said. ‘For the future! That will not stretch very far. Dear Mr. Severne, I am run out. I have no spirit or strength. Do you remember that Doctor Pinkerton, who was *my enemy*—as I used to say—with whom I had the fearful battles? I drove him out—my little victory. But he has had his revenge. I met him not long ago; but he knew me at once, and came to me. He attends me, looks after me, now and again. That is *his* revenge. Oh, he is so kind and good! Oh, if I was beginning this world again, I should live in a different way. I see there is much kindness and goodness in

this world. I did not know it—it is too late, perhaps, now.’

“We looked at her and understood her.

“‘There is only a Short Way indeed left to me,’ she said, smiling, ‘this Doctor Pinkerton told me *that*. He says about a year. But I think he is wrong. I wonder it has not come long ago. Then I should have been sorry—perhaps have been frantic. But now, what I have gone through, you cannot so much as conceive. *Indeed*, believe me, *I made the best battle before I came down to this*. *Indeed* I did. But one must live, as the Frenchman said. But now there is no necessity for *that*. I am tired, and want to go home, as poor Sir John used to say, wherever that may be.’

“‘You must get rid of these lugubrious thoughts,’ said Severne, kindly; ‘a cheerful future will be before you yet, if you will only apply your mind to it. We shall all do our best.’

“‘It is nonsense,’ she said, almost smiling. ‘I am worn out *here*,’ laying her hand on her chest. ‘But you don’t know all. I dare not

look forward to that quiet life you speak of, even if I were well. I have spectres of my own to trouble me. My life has been long, though short enough. But somehow, in the flare of this gas, I do not see backwards, and do not think ; but in the darkness I feel pain.'

"I suppose we talked on thus for an hour or more. She was a gallant creature after all, and, as she said, had gone through so much. She had really to fight for her daily bread, as she said. For every woman's—though not man's—hand was against her. It was as dismal a business, I assure you, as ever I passed through, and sent me away quite melancholy.

" 'A year,' said Severne, as we went away. 'Why, I don't give her two months. She's worn out with consumption.'

"As we went out she caught Severne's hand, and drew him back. He told me afterwards what she said. 'Don't—*don't* think me lost to everything because you have found me. I would have died sooner than you should have known—believe that.'

“ ‘I can—I know it. I believe you always had a regard for me. Whatever others had to complain of, I had nothing.’

“ ‘I am so glad to hear those words,’ she said, ‘from you.’

“It was arranged that she was to send in the morning and tell him what she had fixed.”

“Clever creature,” said Mr. Bouchier, “knowing, clever one. Got the hook in his gills again.”

“You shall hear,” said Selby. “She did not send that day, nor the next, and then we sent and found her place shut up, and the man bolted. She, they told us, had gone that very night, and they had never seen her since. Severne never saw her again—save once. That was like fixing a hook in his gills, as you say, eh?” He went on. “She was a genuine creature, you see, after all. I was greatly provoked, and Severne too, for we saw it was her pride; and we tried hard to make her out and get some clue, but we could not.

“Do you remember the dinner old Lutestring gave when he wanted to advertise his new gold

plate? He asked me. That was three months after; and I went, saw, and ate off the gold plate."

"I hate your metal plates; your knife always squeaks and scratches on them," said Mr. Fox Bouchier.

"I came home very late, and as I came in I found a letter: it was from a doctor—that Pinkerton she spoke of—who said that she was ill and dying, and wished to see me. 'And,' says the doctor, 'I think you had better lose no time, for the poor soul wont be long in the hospital.'"

"Hospital!" they repeated, greatly taken aback by this unclean and ungenteel allusion,—“Hospital!”

"Yes, one of the great, rambling, crowded hospitals. I was very tired at the moment, and not very well, and it gave me a sort of chill. But the cab was at the door still, and I ran down and jumped in, just as I was. On the road I passed close to Severne's square: it was only a little bit out of the way, and something inspired me

to go round by his house. There was a light in his window : they had been at some of *their* balls, too. I sent up word, and he came down at once ; and when I told him, he got in beside me, and we drove away."

"Didn't go up and tell her ladyship ?" said Fox Bouchier, with a simper. "Egad, this looks an odd business."

"The streets were very silent," went on Selby, without taking any notice of this remark, "and we seemed to be a very long time going. You know that set of black, dirty streets you get into going towards the back parts of town, by Bishopsgate Street? They seem endless. I thought we would never have done with them. They light them worse, too, I believe, than the better parts. Severne scarcely spoke, except to say now and again, 'Unfortunate creature! what a finish! I am glad you came, though. What a life, though—what a finish!'

"We were at the place at last: a poor and struggling hospital, as we heard afterwards, with walls like a prison. We asked for 'Jane Bell,' for

that was the name the poor soul had taken to hide herself. The man at the gate stared at the two gentlemen in dress coats and white ties, then showed us the way upstairs, called an old and sleepy nurse, and handed us over to her. We were in long, whitewashed galleries, with a dim jet of gas burning blue at the end. It was as dismal a journey down these passages as ever I went. It was very cold, too. ‘What a finish!’ I heard Severne say to himself.

“There—she had brought us now into a large, very high, whitewashed room, with a great many rickety-looking beds, but, as we could see, with only two occupied—no fire, and a dip candle that was bent crooked on the chimney-piece. We went down softly to the bed, and—there *she was*.

“Such a changed creature, even from *that* night—when she was changed enough! She seemed like a shadow—a mere ghost of herself—with no colour in her cheeks, which were all shrunk in and flattened. Severne turned away when he saw her, and motioning to me stood a

little behind the curtains so that she could not see him.

"The woman brought the crooked candlestick over, snuffed its long wick with her fingers, and pulled at the bed-clothes to rouse her; then she turned her head wearily, and saw me. Her eyes—they were still the old eyes we used to talk of at Digby—lit up with some light, and she half raised herself, but fell back again. She gave a smile of pleasure;—she had rather large and rosy lips, but they were thin and pinched now. I noticed her finger went up to a bow that was under her chin, and then I saw that she had a very neat cap on—I suppose to receive company *like a lady*.

"‘Oh, you have come,’ she said; but I could hardly hear her, she spoke so thin and huskily. I had to bend down closer, to listen to her. ‘I could not have expected this—it was very kind of you. And yet I *had* a feeling that you would come to me. I had indeed.’

"‘Of course,’ I said, ‘but why are you in this place? Surely you might have known that you had friends who——’

“ ‘ I knew you would think *that*, ’ she said ‘ and that *they* would think it. But though I have had the worst of it,—yes, Mr. Selby, they have beaten me right and left—they were *too* much for my poor strength,—I had my old pride left. They didn’t drive *that* out of me, thank heaven. ’ I spoke as kindly as I could to her. ‘ Well, you have done what you wished, but let us help you now, if it is not—— ’ and I stopped myself. But she only smiled—‘ If it is not too late. It is, I am afraid, Mr. Selby. Make *her* tell you what that Doctor said this very night. She is not attending, poor old soul ! He gave me but a few hours—though, indeed, I feel a new life since you have come into the room. ’ She was in fact speaking stronger. ‘ Oh, you cannot fancy what I have suffered here in this *dreadful* place ! Only think, Mr. Selby, for one that *has been bred a lady*—for no one can deny *that*, can they ? Let the gossips, who have always been so free with my poor name, say what they like. I made a good marriage, and had my house in Brooke Street—and—and—I might have done even

better, and been as respectable as the best of them, *had they only given me a chance.* But they would not. Those women—ladies they are called—made a conspiracy against me—joined—hunted—*hunted me!* I believe men have hearts. *They* were always good to me—*they always gave me a chance.*'

"She sank back exhausted after this, and lay with her eyes—they were very glowing now—fixed on the ceiling.

"‘Don't think of these things now,’ I said ‘but let us see what can be done for you. There must be a better place here, which could do until morning—some more comforts—or——’ She shook her head.

"‘It is kind of you,’ she said, ‘oh, so kind! You were always good and true. I knew you would be wondering and thinking. Another would have written, asking for help—for money, would she not?’

"‘Yes, yes,’ I said, seeing her earnestness.

"‘Ah, yes,’ she said; ‘*but not a lady.* I had my old rags of dignity about me, and I wanted

to show you I had *something* left. Not quite the adventuress your friends would have described me. *They* don't do those sort of things. And though I have suffered here, Mr. Selby—oh, so much!—I am so happy to think I held out. They could not beat me out of that. And this was what I was afraid of—that you would not know this: but now it may all end as soon as it pleases.'

"Then she was silent again, and by the light of the flaring dip, which had a long wick again, I saw her smiling at the ceiling. I would have given anything at that moment to have known how to say something—something religious or suitable; for as for beginning with anything about having hope, or thinking of one's sins, with a person like her—I mean,' added Selby, 'going into the conventional exhortation—it would have been mere absurdity and waste of time. And yet I am convinced there *was* some way of putting the thing in some short and practical fashion that *would* have touched her, if I only knew human nature enough to hit on it.

"Suddenly she spoke to me. 'Did you

remark also I sent to *you*, not to him? Not for the world would I have done it, though you recollect he *told* me to do so. Oh! Mr. Selby,' she said, half raising herself; 'I am getting very tired, and feel a very cold hand *here*,' as she laid her hand on her poor chest—'as if I was all sinking in! But I wanted you to tell him, when you see him: it might have looked like neglect; but it *was* not: indeed, no. But it would be an inexpressible comfort to me to know, that *he* thought I was *not* the creature they all said I was; at least not towards *him*. For he was always good, and like a gentleman; and though I deceived him in a little thing or so, yet I was driven to it by the sort of *game* as they call it, which I had to play to *get my crust*. You will say I thought of him, and was so gratified; and it would have been a comfort to have seen him, even here in this place: but, as I say, it was only my old pride—and——'

"At this moment he came out softly from behind the curtain. He took her hand, and bent over her, and spoke to her very kindly and

tenderly. 'I have come,' he said, 'and I have heard; and I believe what you say. But you should not have done this; you should have sent to me. Don't be cast down: better days will come, and *are* coming. We shall get you well, or better. And in the morning, the first thing, we shall get you away from this place, and then——'

"She shook her head, and smiled. 'In the morning, yes—I shall be away from this place. But I am so happy,' she continued, 'that you have come; and indeed I am glad that you have heard. It was so *good* of you. But it was time that it should all end. I was getting weary, and very tired; for,' she added, with a face of terror, 'you cannot guess all I have *gone through* within the last few months—real suffering—real agony! You know I was brought up to be a lady; and indeed my life has *not* been pleasant, though it seemed so. I was always beginning again, and latterly, Mr. Severne, *always being beaten*—they were too much for me. That sort of thing sickens one to death: one

loses heart: and so at last I gave way, and gave over striving; and then I was swept down—*down to this!* But I never sent to you—never; and all through I did not scheme against *you*,—don't think *that*,—though I appeared to do so. Do you recollect the old days at Digby? I never forgot how you took my part there; you were kind to me. What a life since! what ups and downs!—most *downs* with me! And yet it might have all turned out well. Surely *I was not meant to end in this wretched, degrading, squalid way!*—in this wretched place! in all this suffering and agony! Oh, Heaven help me!

“She gave a sort of cry. Severne soothed her and comforted her very tenderly.

“‘Don't leave me here,’ she said, catching at his hand; ‘it is killing me. The bleakness and barrenness is destroying me: you know I have not been accustomed to it. It is all so cold—at the heart. But I am so glad you are with me.’

“‘Yes,’ said Severne, ‘and we shall stay. Don't be afraid. Cheer up. And now listen to me for a second.’ And he bent over her, but I

could hear what he whispered. 'You know I am your friend, and always was; and I should like to think that you were happy. You know I am no preacher, and never was; but still, at this moment, just a thought—a prayer——'

"She put out her hand. 'Ah! I would do much for you. But—but—they called me an *actress*. I can't *act here*. That is all over now. Why should I act with you? I remember this saying in an old church—was it at Digby?—about a leopard changing its spots. And Jenny Bell, at the last ten minutes, is to change hers? No, no, dear Mr. Severne, I am open and straightforward in *that*.'

"'Never was there so fatal a delusion,' said Severne, passionately. 'I am your friend, I tell you. A single thought, a single wish, a prayer—these things have done much before. At a time like this, as much can be done in a minute as in a year. There is no acting in *that*. Listen to me, dear Jenny.'

"'Acting!' she repeated, with her eyes on the white ceiling; 'do you remember the old night

of the charades, and our little battles? You thought I was very bitter then—though indeed I was not. And Lord John—he came to see me a good deal—I knew him very well. He always treated *me like a lady*—always. He got me to Lady St. Ryder's, and I took her—my daughter—Lord John—Helen. She and *her father* don't quite approve of this, but——'

"I heard Severne again whispering: 'Just one thought—one word.'

"'There it is again!' she said, her face all contracting with terror, 'that cold hand, spreading over my chest. Tell them—tell Mr. Severne—I shall wait in *the cloak-room*.'

"The old nurse, rousing by instinct from a sort of torpor, said, 'There, it's coming now.'

"Severne could not speak. She was feeling about a little wildly with her fingers, and caught his hand.

"'Tell him,' she said—so softly that I could not hear, but he told me after—'*that I shall wait in the cloak-room!*'

“It was not very long in coming after that.”

* * * * *

Selby drew the decanter over, and drank off a glass of sherry.

“No one going to take more claret?” said the host.

“What do you say—suppose we go up to the ladies?”

THE END.



